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THE

BOOKS



SIX MONTHS IN THE RANKS;

OR,

THE GENTLEMAN PRIVATE.

"Vixi puellis nuper idoneus
Et militavi non sine gloriâ."
HORACE.



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SIX MONTHS IN THE RANKS.



CHAPTER I.

MY ANTECEDENTS.

I ENLISTED into the British army because I had got into a scrape. Her Majesty owes a great many good soldiers to the same reason.

I had been at an aristocratical public school and at a university; but having left my college somewhat prematurely, in consequence of a hint from the authorities that a few months' country air would do me good, I was not received home with the affectionate sympathy to which I thought myself entitled. My father packed me off to a private tutor's, to read for the army; but the tutor was an easy man, so that I spent most of my time making love to one of his daughters, and running up bills for what tradesmen when they sue infants in county courts call the necessaries of a gentleman's existence—cigars, dog-carts, champagne, and so forth. My tutor, when he perceived that I was making more progress with his daughter than with my studies, sent me home; and my father paid off my liabilities, but he promised that he would never do so again. I had by this time lost my chance of getting into the army with a direct commission, so my family turned my thoughts towards the

Bar. I was entered at one of the Inns ; a hundred-guinea fee was paid for me to a barrister with whom I was supposed to read ; and I embarked on a serious course of ill-cooked dinners along with a number of other law-students who were intent upon eating their ways to the woolsack.

I ought to have been happy in this phase of my life. My allowance was a fair one ; my three companions in Mr. Pounceforth Blewbagge's chambers were jolly dogs ; and we learned as much law between us as may be picked up by penning deeds of a morning, and devoting our afternoons and evenings to gay dissipation. Mr. Pounceforth Blewbagge was too busy to look after us ; and his head-clerk, an old gentleman who used to deplore that not a judge on the bench knew anything of law, did nothing for us but shake his head solemnly every time we asked leave to absent ourselves from chambers—which was as good a way of acceding to our requests as any other. Sometimes I used to practice my rhetorical talents at the Cogers' Hall in Salisbury Court, or at the Temple of Discussion Forum in Fleet Street. I was also a regular attendant at a theatre, where a great tragedian with long hair and a cavernous voice thrilled crowded audiences nightly. But I was less attracted by the fascinations of this eminent man than by a pretty actress, who had the darkest eyes and rosiest dimples imaginable.

One evening, after I had for a week endeavoured to arrest this young lady's attention by winking at her from the front row of stalls, I made so bold as to send her a bouquet and a love-letter by a box-opener, who charged me half a sovereign, saying it was his fixed price "for such jobs." I received in return a card, inviting me to an afternoon party at the actress's house on the following Sunday. I also got a pleasant nod and a smile from my enchantress, who seemed to have no bashfulness about acknowledging

her admirers from behind the foot-lights. Dear me, what a charming girl I thought her! Sunday arrived—as it generally does, be the week ever so long—and at five o'clock I drew up at Miss Florence Gayhard's house in St. John's Wood. I had expected to find a small and select company discussing High Art: I found about sixty people, two-thirds of whom were men. Among them were several of my old school and college friends. They were punting royally at roulette. A long table in the centre of the drawing-room was covered with a red cloth, which was parcelled out into a great many squares marked with white figures. Miss Gayhard acted as banker, and had a large box partitioned into receptacles, for bank notes, gold, and silver, close to her hand. In the next room a couple of footmen were uncorking champagne, or serving coffee and liqueurs to all comers. The rooms, though grandly furnished, reeked worse of cigar smoke than even the Cogers' Hall. Miss Gayhard, in her black velvet dress, with a white ruff and her nimbus of wavy golden hair, was just discernible to the naked eye, like a waxwork figure in a fog.

I had ten pounds in my pocket—all my ready money till next allowance day, which was six weeks distant—and this sum very quickly found its way into Miss Gayhard's box. She favoured me with the same pleasant nod and smile as at the theatre, but I could get nothing more. Presently, however, seeing me stand sheepishly at the foot of the table, she kindly asked me in the hearing of everybody whether I would not like to go on playing, and she offered to lend me five pounds. The proposal was too civil to be declined. I began again; won twenty pounds; repaid my loan; had a glass of champagne, and in less than half an hour had one hundred pounds in gold and notes in front of me. A footman politely nudged me, and tendered another glass of wine on a silver-gilt tray. I glanced to the upper end of the

table, and saw that Miss Gayhard was pledging me, with the sweetest, most confidential glance shooting over the rim of her glass. I swallowed the champagne and went on playing, until somebody remarked we had had enough. I had lost all my winnings, and a hundred and fifty pounds besides, for which I had given promissory notes payable within a week.

This was my financial position when I left Miss Gayhard's house at eight o'clock, her dinner hour, having not so much as a shilling about me for a cab fare. Next morning I had to consider ways and means. An addition sum showed me that I owed about three hundred pounds to the world at large, besides the hundred and fifty pounds lost at Miss Gayhard's; and the result was a visit to a money lender, who was good enough to advance me two hundred pounds on a bill of sale of the furniture in my chambers, some prints, books, ornaments, and other things—the property being worth in all about seven hundred pounds. I lost no time in paying my debt of honour, but it was no use to think of satisfying my other creditors with what remained; so the question arose in my mind as to whether I should plod on at work, for which I felt no taste, or make a fresh start in life altogether?

Young men are very fond of fresh starts when they have been making bad ones. My creditors were not dunning me yet; but they would be sure to begin doing so before long, and my family would likewise hear before long that I had parted with all my belongings for less than a third of their value. I have no very high opinion of young men, judging by what I myself was. It never seems to have occurred to me, that since it was inevitable my father would hear of my scrape, it would have been better in the first instance to apply to him for the money I wanted, leaving him to estreat my valuables if he pleased. Some Frenchman has said—

“Un père est un banquier donné par la nature.”

But perhaps I was afraid my father would not be alacritous to honour my draft; and in any case I had not the courage to face the severe lecture I had deserved. I thought it would be more manly to break off entirely with my past life—a delicate, youthful euphemism for bolting from a difficulty. I would enlist in a crack regiment, win glory by my valour, and return in an officer's uniform, to receive the proud embraces of my family. So, with considerable self-admiration, I sat down to write a doleful but cock-a-whoop letter. There were tears in my eyes, and the fumes of a glass of sherry and bitters were hurrying through my head. I vowed that I was about to become an altered man, and that I would never show my face again until I had amply retrieved all my past misconduct. Then I signed myself—"Your repenting and dutiful son."

That is how I became a soldier.

CHAPTER II.

I ENLIST, AND LEARN HOW TO CHOOSE A NAME.

I WAS just twenty-four when I enlisted. It was on a dull sloppy day in September. I had walked down to Whitehall from the Charing Cross Hotel, where I was staying; and I passed several recruiting officers, loitering between King Street and Parliament Street, without mustering courage to accost any of them. Neither did any presume to accost me. I was too well dressed to make them suspect that I wanted the Queen's shilling; besides which, I suppose I looked more collected than I really felt, for any hesitation in my gait or restlessness in my eyes would assuredly have brought down upon me one of those quick-eyed sergeants, who are accustomed to haul all sorts of fish into their nets.

At last, after standing five minutes in the doorway of the Underground Railway Station, I espied a corpulent red-faced pensioner, standing by himself near Westminster Bridge. Summoning up my resolution, I walked up to him and said straight out, "Sergeant, will you enlist me?"

He drew himself up, touched the peak of his shako, and took my measure at a glance. "Yes, sir; I think you'll do for the Royal Artillery."

"Couldn't I go into the Cavalry?" I asked, thinking of a dragoon uniform which had struck my fancy.

"You're hardly tall enough for that, sir ; and if I were you I wouldn't go into a horse regiment. The stable work isn't fit for a gentleman like you. Take my advice, and let me enlist you as a gunner."

These preliminaries had been so quickly and easily got through, that the pensioner and I had already turned, and were bending our steps towards King Street in confidential talk. I thought it good to state that I had had a quarrel with my family ; but Sergeant Parrot, as this good fellow's name was, did not put me a single indiscreet question. I subsequently learned that men in his position are not anxious to pump their recruits, lest they should sometimes learn too much. It did not matter to Parrot who I might be. I simply represented in his eyes the twenty shillings he would receive if he succeeded in drafting me for twelve years into the Artillery.

On our way some of the recruiting officers, whom I had passed before, stared at us ; and the pensioner, making a sign to one of them, he dropped in to my right. He was a gay-looking trooper, with a blue jacket and a light moustache, who introduced himself as Corporal Swipthorpe of the 6th Dragoons, or Carabineers. He was to be the official witness of my enlistment. So we reached a public-house called the Blue Posts, in King Street, and climbed up a dark and dirty staircase into a dingy room on the first floor, where half a dozen incredibly tattered and squalid recruits were lolling over greasy tables with empty pewters before them.

The sight of these, my future brothers in arms, whom I took at first for mere street vagabonds of the basest kind, made me wince a little ; but not one of them spoke a jeering word. They simply opened their eyes wide in wonder. There was a measuring-machine in the middle of the room, and Sergeant Parrot, who continued to address

me as "sir," requested me to remove my boots and coat, that my height and chest measurement might be taken.

"Five foot eight and a 'arf," said Corporal Swipthorpe, as I stood against the post. "That'll do, sir: now for your chest." I forget what my chest measurement was, but that was pronounced satisfactory likewise. Then Sergeant Parrot drew some blue printed forms from a battered pocket-book, and handed me one to peruse, whilst he sat down to a table, where there was an inkstand, and prepared to fill up another.

The paper began with the words, "*Take notice that you enlisted this day;*" and went on to propound these questions:—"Name? Age? Birthplace? Whether married? Have you ever served before? Have you ever been rejected as unfit for her Majesty's service? Have you ever been branded with the letters D or B C?"*

To the last four of these questions I could answer in the negative. As to names, I had resolved not to give my real ones; but I was disquieted by the sight of three lines at the foot of my notice paper, which informed me, with the delightful plainness of official communications, that if I made any false declaration I should be liable, "*on summary conviction before any magistrate, to be sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, as a rogue and a vagabond.*"

"What name, sir?" asked Sergeant Parrot, poised his pen.

"St. John," I stammered, pronouncing it *Sinjun*, and giving the first name that came to my mind, which was that of the locality where Miss Gayhard had so hospitably entertained me.

"How do you spell it?"

* "Deserter" and "Bad Conduct." Branding had been abolished for some years, but these questions were still put when I enlisted. The giving of the shilling has been abolished also.

"S t—with a small t ; J o h——"

"Oh, no; that won't do," said the sergeant in dismay, as he dropped his voice, and drew a broad thumb across the letters he had written. "Take my advice, now; if you assume a regimental name, choose one that'll read as it's spelt."

"Oh, yes, blow it; have an easy name to read, sir. You'll find it 'll save you such a lot of bother," whispered Corporal Swipthorpe. "You'll get dog-sick of having to spell your name every time somebody wants to write it down."

"Shall I say Dickson, then?" I asked, colouring and laughing, as my glance fell upon that name in connection with an advertisement about whiskey that was posted on the wall.

"Yes, Dickson—'Arry Dickson—that's a good plain name," remarked the corporal, with a nod.

"Dickson—Christian name Harry," wrote the sergeant, using a fresh paper. "Now, 'Arry Dickson, take notice that you have enlisted with me to serve her Majesty the Queen for twelve years, as a gunner in the Royal Artillery. Is that so? Then here's a shilling."

I was now to all intents a soldier. There was no mistake about it, and that red-faced Sergeant Parrot, who looked so tight and puffy in his blue frock-coat, had become my superior officer. He wore a crimson sash, emblem of his authority, and I feared he was going to march me off straight to some barracks in a file with the six vagabonds who had not yet done scrutinizing me with blank astonishment—a proceeding which would have abashed me considerably in passing through the streets. But I had yet to learn in what a casual happy-go-lucky way things are managed in the recruiting department of her Majesty's service.

The sergeant apprised me that on the morrow I should have to pass the doctor's examination, then go before a magistrate to be attested ; after which the colonel at St. George's Barracks would see me, and post me to a depôt either at Woolwich or Sheerness. These formalities would require three days. It was then Thursday, and there was little chance of my being sent to my destination till Monday, as it was usual to post off recruits in batches. What, then, did I propose to do in the meanwhile ? I was already entitled to my pay of 1s. 4d. a day, and also a bed at St. George's Barracks if I liked to accept it. But as the sergeant enumerated these privileges, his looks said plainly that he did not think I was going to avail myself of them.

He was right there, for I was delighted to find that I had still a few days of liberty before me ; so much do we cling to old habits after all. "Well, I'll begin by paying my footing," I said, by way of ingratiating myself. "Will you and these gentlemen have something to drink ?"

The sergeant and the gay corporal said they didn't mind ; and the gentlemen, as I politely designated the vagabonds, all showed signs of awakening life. One of them pulled a bell, and a slatternly wench came upstairs for the orders. My fellow-recruits each called for a pot of beer ; the sergeant and corporal said they would take sixpennorths of gin and water cold ; I asked for a glass of sherry. The composure with which I drew a sovereign from a well-filled purse convinced the observant Parrot that I was accustomed to the handling of money ; but indeed that sagacious veteran had already taken stock of every article about me. My gold watch-chain, signet-ring, scarf-pin ; the cut of my clothes, my linen, the gloss of my hat and my general manner, had all proved to him that I was no swell-mobsmen down on his luck, or a defaulting bank clerk anxious to dive into the army to evade the pursuit of the police. These gentry are

always very eager to shuffle off civilian attire and get into uniform. Two other characteristics about them are that they seldom have more than a few shillings when they enlist, and spend that money in drinking deep, to drown thought and drive off the blue devils.

But so far from wishing to get drunk, I left my sherry untasted, and expressed my desire to get out of the grimy room at the Blue Posts into the open air. The sergeant, the corporal, and I accordingly descended; and at the door the corporal took his leave of me, making a military salute, and good-humouredly wishing me joy of my new vocation. He had too much tact to stop and try to get some pickings off another man's bird; and for the nonce I was Sergeant Parrot's bird, to be plucked by him alone, if at all.

"Now it's my turn to stand something, sir," bluffly remarked the sergeant. "There's a nice quiet little house round the corner, where we can be easy for a chat, if you're not short of time. Perhaps I could put you up to a thing or two, if you don't know much of army life."

"I know nothing about it, and shall be glad to learn. I suppose *you* have seen a good deal of service?"

"Five and twenty years in the Guards, sir—went all through the Crimean War. I've got the medal with five clasps, and a good-conduct medal. And now I'm a married man, with three children to keep, and a pension of half-a-crown a day."

"Do you make much by recruiting?"

"Well, it's pretty middling. Taking the good with the bad—for we do have shocking bad luck sometimes—I get on pretty well. The army's a fine profession. If I had to begin life over again, I wouldn't do otherwise than I have done—no, I wouldn't."

"I hope I may be able to say the same some day."

"Oh, you'll get on right enough, if you let me advise

you," said the sergeant ; and here he nudged me. "A young soldier is all square if he keeps a few rules in his head, which I'll give you. I wouldn't take that trouble with everybody ; but you're a gentleman, you see. Here's the little house I spoke of."

I need not say that the quiet little house was a public, and that, on getting me into the bar parlour, Sergeant Parrot grandly ordered some more liquor, which I eventually paid for. This warrior's drinking powers were extraordinary, and his puffy congested face was the tell-tale sign of them : one might have likened it to the highly coloured sign-board of an inn, so plainly did it speak of the beer and spirituous liquors inside him. But Parrot was no worse than other recruiting officers, with whom drinking is part of their professional work. They must stand treat to recruits, or let themselves be treated, so long as soldiers have to be cadgered for in the highways among those who are not exactly the cream of society.

By the time I returned to my hotel, towards seven, after the sergeant had topped steadily for two hours, I had learned not a little about military life which I should not have suspected. I even ventured to think that the excellent Parrot had been playing on my credulity ; but this was not so, and later on I found almost all the advice he had given me to be valuable. A more truthful, plain-spoken, and yet shrewd man would not be easy to find. Amongst other of his shrewdnesses, Sergeant Parrot manoeuvred to get hold of my wardrobe on cheap terms. "You won't want civilian clothes in the army," he said. "If you have things to dispose of, you'd better sell 'em to me rather than to the Jews, who'll give you next to nothing for 'em."

I answered that I would think of the matter ; but that my mentor might be no loser by his civility to me, I gave him half a sovereign, promising he should have a like sum

when I left London, on condition of his making everything as smooth as possible for me. My manner, apparently, induced him to think that I might pretty soon tire of my soldiering idea when I came to know the rough places of the career.

"Meet me at the barracks at ten to-morrow," he said, when he had thanked me. "And recollect you'll have all day to pay the 'smart,' if you like."

"What's the smart?"

"Why, a guinea. For twenty-four hours you can back out by paying a guinea. That's what many young gentlemen do when they've slept a night over their enlistment. And now good-night, sir. I must march home to my missus."

"Good-night, sergeant."

CHAPTER III.

I PICK UP SOME MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MILITARY
MEN AND WAYS.

THE next morning, as ten was striking at the clock of St. Martin's Church, I entered St. George's Barracks, which is reached by a door under the National Gallery. Probably few Londoners not residing in the neighbourhood are aware of its existence. It is encased among a number of small streets, and being masked in front by the Gallery, is not very easy to find. Strategically its position is unique, for in the event of a revolution a battalion of Guards deployed along the steps of the Gallery and under cover of the railings could clear a rabble with startling quickness out of Trafalgar Square.

In a corner of the barrack-yard, at the foot of some stone steps, were about twenty recruiting officers in various smart uniforms, and quite fifty recruits. Not all of them were tatterdemalions. Some had good clothes; the garments of others had been good once, but were growing prematurely shabby in consequence of the vagabond lives their wearers had been leading for days before taking the Queen's shilling. Costermongers were there, in fur caps and velveteen jackets; discharged ostlers, in peculiarly tight trousers; and there were several leery characters with hair cropped suspiciously

close, who were evidently fresh "unjugged"—that is, released from gaols.

One conspicuous figure in this throng arrested attention. It was that of a groom in a neat livery, with a cockade. He was the servant and foster-brother of a duke's son, and was enlisting so as to go out with his young master's regiment to India. This youth, who stood a little apart, talking with a corporal of Lancers, gave himself considerable airs, as if he thought himself the only respectable recruit in the place; but it was pleasant, nevertheless, to see his lithe figure and rosey face, and to think of what a dashing trooper he would make.

Sergeant Parrot was waiting for me; but he looked seedy, with bloodshot cheeks and sad blinking eyes—almost an old man. He informed me casually that he was always like that till he had taken his third morning drink. As he had only imbibed two "goes" of spirituous refreshment thus far, and as we had half an hour to wait before the doctor would arrive, he led me into the Guards' sergeants' messroom, and "oiled his innards" with a jorum of brandy and water hot, which he could not have procured at the canteen downstairs, where only beer is retailed. Whilst his cheeks were expanding into a glow like tomatoes under the influence of this tipple, I was admiring the comfortable fixtures of the sergeants' room, and fell into conversation with a gorgeous colour-sergeant of Grenadiers, who assured me somewhat superciliously—for these Guardsmen think a good deal of themselves—that if it were not for its non-commissioned officers the Household Brigade would go to the dogs. At this moment my gay friend of the previous day, Corporal Swipthorpe, swaggered in, clinking his spurs and laughing, and exhibited to Parrot a handful of pawn-tickets. "Look here, I've bought these for a sov' of that chap I enlisted yesterday. There are seven watches among them."

"You'll get nailed, if you don't take care," said Parrot, shaking his head, but with something of envy in his tone.

"No, I shan't : who's to nail me? Old Jecky will take the lot of me for three sovs at least. Anyhow, I'm covered now if that chap steps it."

"He wants to lie in lavender, I suppose?"

"No : I rather think he's a moper."

"Do you mind telling me what a moper is?" I inquired, with a smile ; for the foregoing dialogue had been incomprehensible to me. But before the corporal could gratify my curiosity we were all attracted to the windows by the sounds of a loud altercation in the barrack-yard, a female's piercing voice mingling in it. A thin slatternly woman had forced her way into the barracks, and was clamouring to see her husband. "Where's my wagabond of a man? I know he's here, for he 'listed yesterday. Oh, there you are, you wretch, you villain, you warmint ! What am I to do with the children while you go stepping off in a red coat?" Saying which, this lady caught hold of a meagre, unwashed creature, in a soiled holland jacket—who had made a vain attempt to skip up the stone stairs—and shook him lustily, to the great amusement of the bystanders.

"Now young woman, that's enough," interposed a gold-braided sergeant of Horse Artillery, who was laughing with the rest. "This party belongs to me."

"No, he don't : he belongs to me, and his children," screamed the woman defiantly, without releasing her hold. "A house-painter who gets good wages eight months out of the twelve, and might save up for the winter if he liked ; but no,—it's his game to get drunk like a beast, and then, when winter comes, to go and 'list, so as to have warm clothes and food, leaving me and the children to starve. He's served me that trick once before ; but he shan't again."

"Well, will you pay the 'smart' then?"

"Not I. You and this wagabond would split the guinea between you, and then he'd cut off and 'list at Woolwich. I'm up to them dodges."

"Now Maria, do let me go," prayed the truant husband, in a meek deprecating tone, though he tried to join cynically in the laugh which had been raised against him. But the only response he got was to be more vigorously shaken than before, while the laughter of the other recruits redoubled.

"Well, then, come along, since you won't pay the smart," cried the sergeant bluntly. "We'll go before the magistrate, and I'll charge him with having made a false declaration on his enlistment. He said he wasn't married: that will get him three months at Millbank."

g "All right! We'll go arm-in-arm, if you like," cried the undaunted wife; "but mind, all you sodgers here, red coats and blue, this chap here is my husband, so you'll know his sneaking face again if he axes you for the shilling." And linking her arm resolutely in that of her crestfallen lord and master, the spirited wife stamped forward, dragging the unwashed creature with her, and the brilliant sergeant of Horse Artillery followed, wagging his head like a man who is going to see justice done.

"Well, that woman is one of the right sort," remarked Corporal Swipthorpe, turning from the window, with a laugh. "The sergeant ought to stand her a drink, for he's well rid of a bad bargain."

"But the woman will have got her husband sent to prison," I remarked.

"Not she—get along. You'll see the sergeant come back in a minute, for the woman will square the matter with him outside for five bob. What's the use of his going to waste a lot of time at the police court, to get a skinny black-guard like that sent to gaol?"

"But he will lose his enlistment fee if the man goes off, won't he?"

"Oh, he would have lost that anyhow, I expect. You heard what that woman said about her husband having a good trade during the fine weather. Well, he's one of those scamps who like to get into snug winter quarters, and desert as soon as they can go back to their work again. If the coming winter isn't a hard one, he would probably have stepped it soon after Christmas, and then the sergeant would have got nothing, for our fee isn't paid if a recruit deserts within three months."

"That's hard lines, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; it is very hard lines; and we recruiters lose a good bit of money that way. I expect that house-painter has deserted more than once already; and before a week's out he'll be off to Chatham and enlist there, if they'll take him. As it's likely his wife will have to feed him all through the winter, she'd do as well to let him have his head—the ugly brute."

"It seemed to me that he went off with his wife pretty readily."

"Ay, of course he would," answered the corporal; "for the gaff was blown, you see, once his wife knew in what regiment he had enlisted. She might have put in a claim against him as a married man, and got sixpence a day out of his pay. Then he would have been confined to barracks for three months, with extra pack-drill, and it would have been difficult for him to desert. That wasn't his cue at all; he's not the sort to soldier on twopence a day. Into whatever regiment he goes he'll have a sham name, and take care not to let his wife know where he is. But I beg pardon, sir," said the corporal, breaking off, and finishing a dram of rum; "here's the doctor, and we must go upstairs."

Upon this we all walked out of the mess-room; and on

my way through the yard I remarked to Sergeant Parrot, on the strength of what I had just heard, that there seemed to be some queer fish in the British army. Was the whole service made up of scarecrows and flash men like those who were trooping up the stairs in such noisy disorder, using oaths and slang enough to make one's ears red? I noticed that some of these gentry cast glances of affection at my watch-chain. The sergeant perhaps noticed it too, but he said a kind word for the lot.

"You won't know 'em again when they've got their regimentals, sir," he said, wiping the alcoholic mixture from his lips, and throwing out his chest in a thorough sergeantly fashion. "The uniform changes their looks, and their manners likewise. Why, before I enlisted I was the greatest young rascal who ever had a birch broom laid on his back. I'd pretty nigh broke my father's and mother's 'earts."

"But you had some good stuff in you?"

"Ah, h'm! It was just a toss up, sir; no more. If I hadn't enlisted, and got at once under strict masters, God knows where I should have been now. Do you see that young groom, there? You think, I dessay, he'll make a good soldier, because he looks so honest. Well, to tell you my opinion, he'll sicken of the service in six months; and if he don't buy his discharge he'll go altogether to the bad."

"Why?"

"'Cos he thinks too much of hisself—a mighty deal too stuck up. His conceit would be rubbed out of him if he was enlisting on his own hook, and had his way to make by hisself. But he's going into a regiment where one of the officers 'll be favouring him, and that 'll encourage him to take liberties. One of these days he'll be giving a back answer to his corporal, and twenty officers wouldn't save him from the consequences of that—at least, not after the first offence. A man mustn't give hisself hairs if he wants to get on in the army."

"I'll try to remember that," I said, reflectively; "and I hope I shan't sicken of the service so soon as that groom. By-the-bye, what did Corporal Swipthorpe mean by calling one of those recruits a moper?"

"Ah, that chap who sold 'im the pop tickets," said the sergeant, grinning. "Well, a man who wants to lie in lavender is a fellow who's avoiding the police; and a moper is a chap who's dog-sick of putting his hands into other chaps' pockets, and wants to try what honesty's like just for a change. It's a fit that comes over some of 'em at times, though it don't allus last long."

"So that man who sold the pawn tickets was a thief?"

"Well, I don't exactly 'xpect he got them 'ere seven watches as birthday presents."

"Then do you mean to say you enlist a man whom you suspect to be a pickpocket."

"We've no proof that he's a pickpocket," replied the cautious Parrot; "and suspicions don't signify, as the monkey said when the old woman counted her walnuts and found six missing. But now all those chaps have gone up, sir, and your turn won't come for ten minutes. Would you like a bath?"

"A bath in there?" We had passed through a doorway, and the sergeant pointed to a flagged chamber where there was a large square tank filled with water the colour of pea-soup. The sight was not tempting, and I answered, "No, thank you."

"Well; 'tain't particularly nice to look at," said Sergeant Parrot, "but I thought it right to ask you."

CHAPTER IV.

I STRIP, PASS, AND GET A CHEAP DINNER.

THE tank was kept for the accommodation of those recruits whose ablutions at home were intermittent. A score at least must have used it that morning ; and, as we passed, a very dingy-looking boy was splashing about in it, and rubbing himself with a hard scrubbing-brush lathered with yellow soap. The doctor expects recruits to come before him quite clean.

I followed Sergeant Parrot up a broad staircase to the waiting-room, whence sounds of laughter and horse-play issued. It was a large square room with whitewashed walls, provided with long rows of clothes-pegs. On the side facing the door was a big stove with a roaring fire in it, and surrounded with wooden forms, on which were huddled about thirty recruits stark naked. Some others in the same attire were playing leap-frog in a corner. Corporal Swipthorpe and another recruiting officer kept bawling to them to keep quiet ; but they happened to be in a frolicsome humour, and it was not easy to quiet them.

Heaps of clothes were lying all round the room and hanging from the pegs. Sergeant Parrot told me to undress, and hinted, with a significant glance at my companions, that I had better give him my purse, watch, and other trinkets. I had dressed plainly that morning, in a suit of "dittoes" and a felt hat, to avoid attention ; but the

mere fashion of my garments and the quality of my linen caused the recruits to nudge one another and exchange whispers as I undressed. They were all, however, from first to last, particularly civil, and when I had stripped several called out to me, "Come near the fire, sir," and made way for me with a good-fellowship which I promptly acknowledged by seating myself among them, and laughing at such jokes as flew about.

The smart groom, from being less affable, came to almost instantaneous trouble. He had undressed himself with a haughty affectation of speaking to nobody in the room, and had hung his hat on a peg. A larkey young man, who looked like an ostler out of work, took down this cockaded head-dress, and clapped it on his own pate, provoking a roar of laughter. The groom, perceiving what was up, flushed indignantly and demanded his property. But meanwhile another nude recruit had quietly slipped into his neat top-boots, and was dancing a hornpipe in them. This was too much for the groom, who strode towards his despoiler with his fists clenched; but just at this moment a third caitiff, manœuvring behind, brought down his irreverent palm somewhat smartly on the chubbiest part of the groom's person, eliciting a yell of pain: "Ooh-ah!"

"Now what's all this—will you be'ave yerselves there?" interposed Corporal Swipthorpe; and retaliating upon the lad who had assaulted the groom, he gave him a friendly cut with a riding-whip, which made him leap a yard into the air, and rub himself afterwards, with an astonished expression which caused uproarious merriment.

I did not witness the end of this hilarious scene, for Sergeant Parrot called me from the landing by my new name of Dickson; and I filed into the doctor's room with a batch of other striplings, and with as dignified a gait as could be assumed under such circumstances.

The room was well warmed, so that we experienced no ill effects from the scantiness of our costume. The doctor was a mild, gentlemanlike man in plain clothes ; but he was attended by a hospital-sergeant in uniform, who had a pen behind his ear, a measuring tape in his hand, and who spoke gruffly : " Now then, stand all in a row—heads erect, eyes front, and no talking. Here, you there, step foward and be weighed."

We were all severally weighed, measured for height and chest-breadth, and sounded as to our lungs by the doctor placing his ear on our chests. We were made to show our teeth, to breathe hard, and to cough. Then we touched our toes with the tips of our fingers without bending the knees, and we each hopped across the room twice, first on one foot then on the other. Finally our eyesight was put to the proof.

This is the most perplexing of all ordeals to men whose eyes are not of the keenest. The hospital-sergeant placed a hand over my left eye, and the doctor, standing at the other side of the room, held up a card covered with a number of black dots about the size of peas. Partially concealing the card with one hand, he asked how many dots I could see? I managed to give three correct answers so long as I had my right eye to see with ; but when I had to judge with my left, I blundered. " Seven," I said.

" No ; try again."

" Six."

" Yes, but that's guess work. It's no use sending men into the Artillery with weak eyes. Now here's another chance : how many ?"

" Five," I replied, and this got me passed ; but the truth is I had not seen any dots at all, for my left eye had become suddenly misty, and I should infallibly have been rejected had not the hospital-sergeant, standing behind me, laid the

five fingers of his disengaged hand, unseen, upon my back. I was quick enough to take the hint, and was not much surprised to learn afterwards that Sergeant Parrot had "tipped him the wink" to see me safe through my medical examination. That downy Sergeant Parrot was up to every move on the board; and I suppose the doctor's assistant presently got his half-crown for getting me certified of good eyesight. "Mind you," observed Parrot, a few moments later, when I was in possession of my certificate and had dressed myself again, "mind, you'll have to pass the doctor once more when you get to your dépôt, so if you feel shaky about your eyesight just grease the palm of your bombardier, and he'll see you squared; unless, indeed, you'd like to play the Walker trick."

"What's the Walker trick?"

"Why, supposing now you was to be rejected by the doctor at dépôt, you'd be declared 'unfit for service,'" explained Parrot, "but you couldn't be packed straight off on that account. They'd have to write up to the Horse Guards for your discharge, and a full month would pass before you got it. During all that time you'd be clothed, fed, paid, and have nothing to do but show up on parade once a day, and twiddle your thumbs about the rest of the time. You might see a good deal of military life in that way without much bother."

"Yes; but you would lose your sovereign on my enlistment."

"Oh, but as you're a gentleman, you'd make that right for me, I've no doubt," rejoined Parrot, coolly; and downstairs we went, on more confidential terms than ever.

I was glad to have passed the doctor's examination, for it would have humiliated me to be debarred from wearing the Queen's uniform owing to any reason of physical unfitness. The doctor rejected more than a dozen candidates

that morning, and some of these, whom I saw by-and-by in the canteen, cut the most wretched figures. One or two affected to treat the matter lightly, saying they would go and try the doctor at Woolwich ; but one tow-haired youth, who acknowledged himself to be a runaway apprentice, and who had been rejected as obviously too young, blubbered like a calf, and excited a good deal of rough sympathy. Touching this question of age, I should mention, that although the limits for recruits are stated on the enlistment papers as eighteen and twenty-five, I saw one man passed who was clearly over thirty, and two or three who could scarcely have been seventeen. As no papers of identity are required, the doctor can only exercise his judgment in guessing whether a recruit has given his age truthfully or not ; and such guesses are not infallible. Moreover, as will appear in a moment, a great many recruits contrive to scramble into the army in despite of the doctor's *veto*.

Being anxious to get my attesting before the magistrate done with, I proposed to Parrot that we should repair to Westminster as soon as it suited his convenience ; but he had three other recruits to look after besides myself, so it suited his convenience for the present to lead me off to the canteen. His three recruits were entirely dependent on him for meat and drink, as they had not a penny between them, and he did not consider it advisable to trust them long out of his sight, lest, having filled their stomachs, they should give him the slip. Parrot's mistrust of ordinary recruits was based on a long and profound experience of their ways. He never hardened his heart against appeals for drink, but he was deaf to all requests for money. These men were entitled to their pay of 1s. 4d. a day ; but Parrot cocked his eye when one of them hinted that an instalment of this sum in specie would be acceptable. " You take me for one of them flats that the gentry have begun to live upon in their

tall new houses, young Corduroys," said he, giving the applicant a jovial slap on the shoulder. "No, my hearties ; you come down and have a good dinner apiece, and if there's anything due to you when you start for your depôt, you shall have it in coin—but not till then, if I know it."

The canteen was composed of two large rooms on the basement floor, which looked like a German beer-cellar. It was kept by a sergeant-major and his wife, and everything in it was scrupulously clean. A large throng of "Johnny Raws" and recruiting officers were refreshing themselves at the long deal tables with ale and stout, and a good number were tackling eatables. Parrot selected a table, and as it was nearly noon he suggested that he and I should have a bit of summut as well. The bill of fare that day consisted of boiled beef. We all five seated ourselves, and in a few minutes were each provided with a sixpenny dinner, which, having regard to the price, was better than anything I had ever tasted before, or have enjoyed since in foreign countries noted for their cheapness. I had a pint of really good beer, which cost twopence ; a plate heaped up with boiled beef, dumpling, potatoes, and cabbage, for threepence ; and a big pennyworth of excellent whole-meal bread. I allowed Sergeant Parrot to pay for this feast, seeing that he had wages of mine in hand ; but noticing how ravenously my companions mopped up the last drops of gravy in their plates with their last pieces of bread-crumbs, I proceeded to endear myself to them all by volunteering to stand bread and cheese, with another go of beer, all round.

Sergeant Parrot assented with a grunt. He could do no more than grunt, for he was too much absorbed in the business of masticating to talk. He, like others, had eaten his dinner in solemn silence, pegging away with knife and fork slowly, steadily, but heartily, as one who has plenty of time on hand, but ~~wants~~ to use his time well. He was a splendid

figure of an old soldier, this veteran Parrot, as he stowed away his toothsome food with undisguised relish. He had unhooked the collar of his tight blue coat, to set his throat free, and had laid down his shako. His round red face shone like a newly varnished Dutch cheese in summer heat ; but his knowing grey eyes roamed in every direction, and winked occasionally to other sergeants who were coming in. The wonder was, that slopping his gravy about as he did in conveying capacious fork-loads from his plate to his mouth, he never let a drop fall on to the spotless breast of his well-worn coat. As a pensioner with a family, the sergeant could not afford more than one frock a year, but that which he wore was always brushed to perfection, and its buttons shone like gold. If a splash of gravy found its way on to his chin, shaved, and ruddy as a peach, Parrot wiped it off with his forefinger. and then wiped the forefinger on the edge of the table, after which he cleaned the edge of the table with a piece of bread crust, which he bolted ; so there was a comely and prudent method in all that this warrior did. When he had swallowed his last mite of cheese, and drained his second pewter so empty that nothing but a disk of froth the size of a groat remained at the bottom of it, Parrot sat silent for a moment, breathing hard, and then said, "Now's the time for a pipe of baccy."

My three fellow-recruits (two of whom were going into the Line, and the third, a bankrupt costermonger, into the 2nd Dragoon Guards) had already produced short clays, and were cutting cake-cavendish into slices.

It was now nearly one, and as almost everybody in the canteen had well eaten and drank, there was a great deal of cheerful talk, joking, and laughter. The canteen sergeant, his brisk wife, and two assistants kept drawing potfuls of beer and serving them ; and still the cry was for more. It was at this stage that I ascertained how certain

young men manage to get into the army, at some loss to the taxpayer, after the doctor has rejected them as unfit.

The "moper" who had sold Corporal Swipthorpe his pawn-tickets had been rejected, owing to constitutional weakness. He was a slight, but well-looking young man, with dark hair and deep thoughtful eyes, not the kind of person one would have taken for a pickpocket. He had set his heart on getting into the 17th Lancers, for the sake of the handsome uniform of that corps; but being now balked of this fancy, he had resolved on entering the army anyhow. Some whispering took place between him, the corporal, and a jolly young workman who had just been passed into the Artillery. Then Corporal Swipthorpe, who had been drinking beer pretty freely, came up and whispered in Parrot's ear. At last the following bargain was concluded without much secrecy. The "moper" handed a sovereign to the corporal, and another to the jolly workman, in consideration of which the latter made over to him his—the workman's—enlistment paper, made out in the name of Edward Grimall. As the doctor who had rejected the "moper" was not going to see him again, there was nothing to prevent the latter from presenting himself at the Artillery dépôt under the name of Edward, or Ned, Grimall, who had passed as physically sound. As for Ned himself, being a tough churl who was sure to be accepted anywhere, he had only to go down to Woolwich and enlist under another name, unless he preferred to make a fresh start in civilian life with his sovereign.

Sergeant Parrot was rather chary of explaining this little arrangement to me while we sat at the table with the other recruits; but half an hour later, while we were rolling towards the Westminster Police Court in a hansom which I had hailed (not much liking to walk in the streets with the pensioner, lest I should meet any of my friends), he

expounded the whole affair with his customary truthfulness. By that time the sergeant was mellow. Before leaving the barracks he had taken a third pint of ale, and then adjourned to the sergeants' mess-room for a tumbler of grog, which was destined to keep the beer steady. His view of things in general were optimist.

"That 'moper' will go into the Artillery along o' you now," he said, laughing. "Never mind; he won't do much harm, judging by his looks."

"He looks sickly, and I suppose the doctor at depôt will reject him?"

"Dunno about that. Doctors take some and pack off others, according to their fancy. It's a toss up. Anyhow, I expect the 'moper' will serve out most of his time in the hospital, and die there o' consumption. Well, ain't that better for him than dying in the infirmary of a workhus or gaol?"

"No doubt: but if there are many recruits of his sort, I should think it cost government a good deal of money."

"Oh, ay; but government has got a long purse, sir," said Sergeant Parrot calmly; "a doosed (*hicough*) long 'un. it is to be sure."

CHAPTER V.

I AM FAVOURED WITH AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

THERE would be little to say about the attestation in the police court, were it not for a gallant little adventure that befell me there.

Parrot and I reached the court while the magistrate was lunching in his private room. He was expected to return in a few minutes. We waited in the pen to which the public are admitted, and while there I attracted the notice of a plump and pretty little woman who sat close by on a bench reserved for witnesses. She was nicely dressed, like the wife of a respectable tradesman in her Sunday best; and she certainly had very bright and eloquent hazel eyes. She smiled at me; I smiled at her. Friendly relations being thus established, she raised one of her small hands, covered with a black glove, and pointed to a slight abrasure of the skin under her left eye.

"What's that?" I asked, with sympathy.

"A nasty drunken woman hit me a blow," she answered, with a little pout. "I'm here to prosecute. What are you here for?"

I pointed to the sergeant, whose back was turned, and the little woman's face forthwith expressed unlimited astonishment.

"You don't mean to say that you've enlisted—a re-

spectable young man like you? Oh, you fool! Don't do that. Come here, I want to speak to you."

"Now then, what's that?" cried the sergeant, wheeling round. "You'll get into trouble, young woman, if you speak disrespectfully of her Majesty's service."

"I said nothing against her Majesty," replied the little woman, colouring; but she left her place to speak to me, and murmured in a whisper quite imploringly: "Don't you go soldiering now; you'll be sorry for it all your life. What a flat you must be! Why, a young man like you could get plenty of situations. When did you take the shilling?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Yesterday only. At what time?"

"About four o'clock."

"Now, ma'am, just you keep back, please," said Sergeant Parrot, interposing his broad arm between me and my fair interlocutrix. "Mind your own business, and it'll be better for you."

"No I shan't," responded the little woman, stoutly, to the amusement of a few loafers and some policemen who were already in court. "That young fellow only enlisted at four yesterday, and you can't get him attested until twenty-four hours afterwards. So he's got at least two more hours to think better of his bargain."

"Hold your noise, will you," shouted the sergeant, roughly. But just then the magistrate's clerk came into court, and catching a few words of the dispute, asked me when I had enlisted? I told him, and he informed the sergeant that I could not get attested till the next day. "The court rises at four," he said, ogling the sergeant over his spectacles. "And you know very well that if it turned out that this man had enlisted a few minutes after four yesterday, he might claim to have any attestation made to-day cancelled. An old soldier like you ought not to make these mistakes."

"All right, sir," answered the sergeant, crestfallen ; but he glared very savagely at the little woman, and got out of temper with me. "What the deuce did you get talking with a bad un' like that for? I brought you down to be attested, thinking as how you'd be glad to get the job over, and now we shall have to come footin' down here to-morrow."

"That's your fault, not mine. You should have warned me in time."

"I'm d—d if it's my fault ; it's yours, for jawing with that female. If you don't care about soldiering you'd better say so : you've still time to pay the smart."

"I've told you already I don't mean to pay the smart," I answered, nettled at his tone ; "and as I'm not under your orders yet, just keep a civil tongue in your head, please,"—which pert retort made old Parrot dumb.

"Silence in court !" now cried a policeman, for the magistrate had come in and the court rapidly filled. About a dozen recruits, and among them the "moper," who had walked down from St. George's Barracks under the escort of Corporal Swipthorpe and a sergeant, struggled into the pen, and were attested by the clerk, who read them a formula of allegiance to the Queen, and handed them a New Testament to kiss. The magistrate was reading the *Times* all the while, and took no heed of the proceedings, which lasted barely a minute. Thus the "moper" passed into the army under the name of Edward Grimall with the utmost ease.

Touching recruits' names, I should mention that I had by this time come to understand how so many persons of the middle and lower classes are blessed with names which sound like bad jokes. A recruit generally enlists under an assumed name, and he chooses this appellation when partially tipsy, with the assistance of a sergeant who is often in

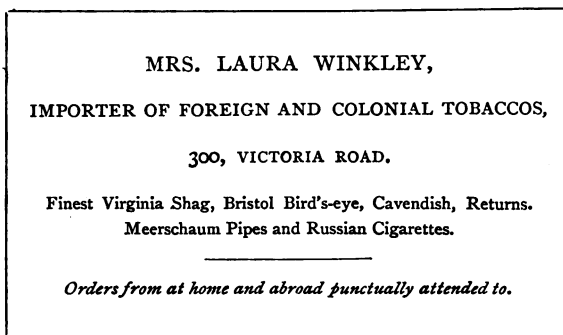
the same condition. The humour of the lower orders being at its best of a broadish kind, the result is to be seen in names which are frequently absurd, and occasionally opprobrious and objectionable. I know a young man who, in a merry mood, gave in his name as *Potofale*. The sergeant, less drunk than he, wrote it down as *Potville*. The next day the lad, being sober, repented, and wanted to have his name amended into *Potts*; but the sergeant, too lazy to make out a new sheet, decided that *Potville* was more euphonious, and kept it so. Another youngster enlisted under the name of *Hitunhard*, and refused to let the sergeant clip the last syllable, so that he was attested under this expressive sobriquet. If these two men, or descendants of theirs, should some day attain celebrity, the Heralds' College will no doubt find some ingenious explanation for the etymology of their names.

While Sergeant Parrot had turned away from me, grumbling, to look after his recruits, the little woman with the bruise under her eye was triumphing in her victory over him. She kept close to me, and fumbled in her pocket, from which she extracted a card. "This is my address," she whispered. "Just you wait for me in the court, and I'll have something to say to you presently. I am a widow, and keep a tobacconist's shop in Victoria Road; but as I'm alone in the shop, I want a young man to assist. If you like, I'll pay the smart for you. Lor! a young man like you ought to take a respectable situation, and not go about with low fellows like that."

She jerked her head towards the sergeant as she said this, and made a grimace, indicating that she had no high opinion of those who wore the Queen's uniform. Then she retreated to her place, and nodded to me several times very significantly.

I was at an age when the heart is of tinder, and sparks

from a pretty pair of eyes quickly set fire to it. The young widow had paid me the compliment of being smitten with me at first sight, and I was disposed to reciprocate the compliment in a certain degree. Her card was printed in this wise.



I pocketed the card and resolved to wait. Sergeant Parrot, who had by this time blustered off his wrath on to the heads of the other recruits, returned to me with his usual easy expression, and said he must be going back to Westminster Bridge, to do some work. He would have been glad, possibly, if I had gone with him to act as a decoy, for he had told me the day before that a well-dressed recruit is often of great help for attracting others; but I declined to accompany him, and promised to join him at barracks on the morrow. As he knew my address, he had no reason to be anxious about me, and so strolled off, wishing me pleasantly good-day. The sergeant was not the kind of man to quarrel with anybody for a testy word more or less.

My fair tobacconist's spirits rose high as she saw him depart, and she gave me another of her knowing little nods. In a few minutes her case was called on, and she entered the witness-box, to charge a stout and termagant

female, who looked like a laundress, with having given her a black eye. The dispute had arisen about a screw of tobacco which the termagant wanted to procure on credit for her husband, who already owed a long bill for screws. Mrs. Winkley had declined to part with her merchandise, and abusive words had ensued. In court the termagant protested that this was all "false as my eye," and during a minute or so both ladies lifted up their voices with amazing shrillness; but the magistrate closed the case very summarily by inflicting a fine of twenty shillings. Mrs. Winkley, who was impatient to be gone, sailed out through the witnesses' entrance, and beckoned to me to join her outside. There was some smiling among the policemen at the unceremonious way in which she took me in tow *coram publico*; but what did she care? Was she not a free woman, paying her rent and taxes like the best, and having a good house to dwell in? Who was there to make her afraid?

She told me all this pretty volubly as she linked her arm in mine and drew me away towards the Victoria Road. After we had walked twenty paces she stopped and said, "Let's have a look at you. Why, you're a head and shoulders taller than me. You've got nice respectable clothes, too. The idea of a young fellow like you being so silly as to sell himself for a shilling! What's your name?"

"Harry Dickson."

"What have you been—a clerk, a tradesman, a gentleman? I hope you haven't done anything wrong? If you have, though, I can hide you. I have a cousin called Harry. He's doing well for himself down Battersea way. He's a grocer. Do you smoke? Well, you shall have a nice cigar presently."

"I am sure you are very kind," I answered. "Are you as obliging to everybody?"

"If you listen to me you won't become a soldier," she

said, evading my question. "Those red-coats are not much to talk of—low fellows, that's what they are. I've an assistant in my shop now, a German, called Prugmann, and I can't abide him. He had the impudence to ask me to marry him the other day. You shall have his place, if you like."

"What would Mr. Prugmann say to that, though?"

"I don't call him *Mr.* Prugmann—only Prugmann, short, which is good enough for him. Why, if I show him the door, he'll have to toddle—that's all."

We were not long reaching Mrs. Winkley's shop, which was a showy place enough, with a plate glass front, and a goodly display of Parisian meerschaums. A tall long-haired young German, with high cheek-bones and a pasty complexion, stood behind the counter, dusting some snuff jars of blue Delft with shiny brass lids, and he eyed me askance. But my bustling Mrs. Winkley, saying no more to him than "That woman got fined a pound," brushed by, and led me into her parlour. There was nothing remarkable in the room, but the horsehair furniture in it was all solid, and everything was scrupulously neat. On one of the walls hung the stiffly-executed oil portrait of a fat man with a masonic apron and a double chin.

"That's my husband, who's dead," remarked Mrs. Winkley, wagging her head towards the picture, as she took off her bonnet, "and this is my parlour. There's a fine drawing-room upstairs, but I let out the first floor to lodgers. My bed-room is on the second storey. Look now through this window. There's a yard behind, with a coal-cellar quite full, and a cellar with some port wine in it. You shall taste some. And I've a thousand pounds' worth of stock on the premises. Prugmann!"

"I am gōming," answered the German deliberately, and came.

"Bring some of the shilling cigars, the mild ones, with the silver paper round them. Be quick." Then she rang the bell, and an old woman appeared, with sleeves turned up and a swabbing-cloth in her hand. "Martha, fetch me two glasses, the corkscrew, and a bottle of port. Here's the cellar key. Prugmann!"

"I am göming," replied the German.

"What are you foraging among all those boxes for?" cried the young widow, sharply. "Don't you know where the shilling cigars are? Those boxes on the third shelf there. How slow you are!" and she snatched the box out of Prugmann's hands.

Five minutes later the port had been served; the parlour door was closed; I was smoking a capital cigar near a good fire; and Mrs. Laura Winkley sat near me, with her dimpling face to the light. She was really a winsome little creature, with her sparkling eyes, small mouth, and vivacious energy. She had a neat foot and dazzling teeth. But as she sat with her hands folded in the lap of her black silk dress, there came a sudden softness over her manner, and she eyed me for a moment with a child's curiosity, examining every article I wore. "Harry Dickson, you can have Prugmann's situation this very afternoon, if you like," she said solemnly.

"Oh, but I shouldn't like to turn him out of it," was my light rejoinder.

"He'll have to go, whether it's you or another that turn him out," she observed. "I can't abear Germans. But then it's hard, you see, for a widow to carry on a business without a man to assist. I've had four assistants, but had to send them all away. There was a young one, who robbed me; an old one, who made love to me; and a middle-aged one, who did both. Then I can't always manage 'em; but I think I could manage you. It's the manners I judge

by, and you ain't coarse, as some are. Suppose you give the place a trial? You shall lodge here, and have all your meals and a pound a week. Won't that do?"

"You forget to add the pleasure of your company, which would count for more than all!" I said, amorously, and tried to take her hand; but she pushed her chair back, and shook her head.

"No, you mustn't take me for what I'm not," she demurred quietly. "I brought you away from that sergeant because you took my fancy—there's no denying that; and if you were a sensible young man I know what you'd do."

"What's that?"

"Why, you'd marry me," she replied, coolly. "Why shouldn't you? It would be better than being a soldier. If you'd be steady and kind to me, I'd be a good wife to you—though I say it who shouldn't, perhaps. And here's a tobacco business which might bring in four hundred a year quite easily, if properly managed. It isn't every young man who has such a chance as that, Harry Dickson."

"Very few have such a chance, Mrs. Winkley."

"Well then?"

The "Well then?" was so artlessly put, that it almost unhorsed me from the military hobby I had been riding so triumphantly for two days. The little woman was so much in earnest, however, that I thought it a shame to trifle with her; and so, twisting my cigar in my fingers, I gave her an outline of my career, omitting names, and bringing out my heroism prominently in a complacent light. She listened to me with that fixed attention which women show in things which interest them vitally; but her good sense was working all the while among my words like a steam winnower, separating what was fact in my narrative from what was idle romancing; and soon I perceived, to my mortification, that she by no means took such an admiring view of my present conduct as I would have desired.

"The truth is, you've behaved wrong, and now you want to make things worse," she remarked, calmly. "Why don't you go back to your father, and tell him that you're sorry, and won't do it again?"

"I've told him that before, more than once."

"And you're too proud and obstinate to say it again. Isn't that it? Why, you ought to be thinking of your mother now, and what she'll feel, not knowing where you're gone to. It ain't manly, what you're doing, a bit. If you're afraid to see your father, shall I see him for you? I'll go directly, if you like."

The idea of this fair tobacconist acting as a mediator between me and my incensed family had its humorous side; but I endeavoured to explain, without wounding her, that her scheme was impracticable. I was beginning to be half afraid of Mrs. Winkley. There was such an expression of firmness on her red lips, now tightened, that if she could have learned my real name, I believe she would have marched off at once on her errand of diplomacy. However, after a minute's reflection, she shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, well, you want to have your fling," she said. "It's the red coat tempts you. When you've been working for a few weeks on less than the wages of a day labourer you'll find out what a fool you've been, and then perhaps you'll think better of what I've said. You mustn't be stuck up because you're a gentleman. If you want to be honest and mend your ways, you might do worse than take the situation I've offered."

"I'll think the matter over," I answered, not wishing to disappoint her.

"If you alter your mind, write to me, and I'll buy your discharge," she answered. "I must have a new assistant, because Prugmann is of no use. He let that woman slap my face yesterday. *You* wouldn't have allowed her, eh?"

"No, I fancy not."

"I don't think you would, Harry Dickson."

After this we talked for a little while longer, and Laura Winkley did not press me further to abandon my dreams of martial glory. But hearing that I had some luggage in London, she suggested that I should bring it to her house, promising she would take care of my clothes and mend all my linen for my return. I was to be sure to let her know where my regiment was quartered, and if I wanted money I was to treat her as a friend. There was a curious mixture of delicacy and boldness in her proposals; but that she was an honest little woman, as well able to take care of herself as any man, needed no demonstration. I took leave of her when dark arrived, and she accompanied me to the door, giving me her hand, which I squeezed affectionately.

"You're a silly young fellow," she said to me, with a shake of the head as we parted.

CHAPTER VI.

I RESIST ANOTHER GOOD OFFER, AND LEAVE FOR
SHEERNESS.

WHY should I not have become a tobacconist? Had I married Laura Winkley I might, if her accounts were true, have made four hundred pounds a year, and perhaps in time have extended her business and become a rich man, noted on the markets where bird's-eye and shag are sold wholesale. This idea kept recurring to me during the next two days, but I always dismissed it as *infra dig.* I deemed it no disgrace to become a soldier, but derogatory to take service as a tobacconist's assistant, even with marital duties added. The truth was, I suppose, that I had no very serious ideas of cutting myself off permanently from my family, and regarded my enlistment as a short, self-inflicted penance, that would in due time touch my parents' hearts. Their hearts were not likely to be touched by hearing that I had given up the Bar to sell cigars.

On Friday I was attested, and on Saturday I passed before a colonel of the Guards at the barracks. By Parrot's directions I was particular to tell him that I had enlisted as a gunner, and not as a driver; for as a driver I should have come in for a good deal of stable work. The colonel was in plain clothes, and took but little notice of any of us. Having read our names, he informed us to what depôts we

were to be posted. I was ordered to join the 1st Dépôt Brigade, at Sheerness, on the Monday.

Time was beginning to hang rather heavily on my hands. It did not suit me to loiter about the public-houses in King Street more than was necessary; and I shrank from calling on any of the friends I had in London, because I should have had to practise the duplicity of pretending that I was still prosecuting my legal studies. It was my desire to drop out of my sphere altogether for a while, but without *éclat*, leaving my acquaintances free to conclude that I was on a visit to my parents, or had gone travelling. Having nothing else to do, I devoted my spare time to visiting some of the sights which, like many other Londoners, I had never thought worthy of attention. I explored the British Museum and the Tower; I climbed to the top of St. Paul's and the Monument, and "did" the Houses of Parliament. Part of an evening I spent at Madame Tussaud's, taking my fill of the Chamber of Horrors. All this was interesting; but, for want of a companion, I felt out of spirits—oppressed with the sense of having done wrong, and being a castaway. Then Sunday came, and I was sorely tempted to call on Laura Winkley, and invite her to dine with me at a restaurant.

I resisted the temptation, not so much because I feared she would recur to the matrimonial question (for, to do her justice, I did not think she would do so), as because I apprehended she would lecture me again for my folly. She had so far left an impression on me, that I should have been happy to flirt with her a little, without going further. Perhaps my vanity was somewhat sore from my having allowed her to treat me so much as a boy, and I was anxious to show her that my aspirations towards a military life were not moonshine, but the chivalrous outcome of my birth and training as a gentleman. However, on second

thoughts, instead of going to Victoria Road, I attended morning service in Westminster Abbey. After luncheon, I spent my afternoon in the smoking-room of the Charing Cross Hotel (a gloomy place), watching the Sunday trains go ; and in the evening I strolled into a Quakers' meeting, up a court near Leicester Square, just to see what it was like. It was like nothing I ever want to see again, and I was glad to get out. Thus my last Sabbath as a civilian crawled by ; and, as a natural reaction upon my melancholy during two days, I awoke on Monday morning in good spirits.

The first thing I did then was to pay my bill, and forward all my luggage to Mrs. Winkley's address. I sent at the same time a letter, enclosing a little gold locket, as a present to her, and three ten-pound notes, which I desired her to keep for me till I should apply for them. My reason for thus availing myself of her good nature was that I did not know where else to bestow my things. Soldiers may not take any luggage into barracks, so that I kept nothing but the clothes I had on me ; and even these seemed far too good to Sergeant Parrot, when I turned up at the barracks towards noon.

"You'd better do a stroke of business with old Jecky, sir," he said, scanning me all over. "He'll give you a better price than you'll get if them 'ere things is sold for you by the provost-sergeant. Hie, Jeck !"

An unclean little old man, with a hook-nose, a fearfully greasy hat, and a club-foot, hobbled up. He had been loitering outside the barrack gate, on the look-out for "bithness."

"Vat can I do for you, Mithter Parrot, thir? Anything for thith young shentleman?"

"I've just been telling him it's no use his going down to Sheerness in that 'ere suit of clothes," said the sergeant.

"No, thir ; yer'd only attract nothith, yer thee," an-

swered old Jeck, coolly passing his hand up my sleeve, to feel the quality of the cloth. "I can let you 'ave a nice plain thuit in exchange for this, with maybe a few shillings over to thpend."

"What would you give him for all he stands in, Jeck?" asked the sergeant. "It's all square, you know."

"All square, ith it? Well, of course you know betht, Mithter Parrot. This young shentleman has a vatch, I thee. Vill you let me take a look, thir? Vatches ain't of much use to soldiers, are they, Mithter Parrot? Shuppose I give you five poundsh for all you've got on?"

"The watch cost forty-five pounds," I replied, laughing; "the chain ten, and the clothes, which are almost new, seven guineas. You wouldn't make a bad bargain."

"Vell, vell; let me look at dish vatch again. Times is very bad, and it'sh only to oblige Mithter Parrot that I'd make it sheven poundsh; but dat'sh all de moneysh I can shpare."

"I'd rather not sell, thanks," I answered, turning away; but old Jeck followed me like a tame jackdaw, croaking.

"Vell, ve'll throw in your gold studs, de shleeve-links, and de scarf-pin, and ve'll call it ten poundsh; but dat's de handshomest offer wash ever made."

"Say twelve pounds, Jeck," interposed the sergeant.

"Twelve poundsh, thir; I couldn't do it, s'help me! I've bid too mush already. You've no idea vat a bad time dish is for clothes and jvelry. Just to oblige you, I'll shay eleven poundsh, but I shall be de loser, I shall, indeed. Eleven poundsh, mishter."

"No; I won't sell," I repeated, but old Jeck caught hold of my skirt with his dirty hands.

"Eleven poundsh. Think vat a deal of money dat ish for a soldier. A whole year's pay; and I'll give you a box of beauthiful shigars into the bargain, to shmoke with your

friends in the canteen. Come along with me now ; my house ith justh round the corner. Let me thee that vatch again ; you'll only get it shtolen if you go into barracks with it. Come, eleven poundsh, mishter, and the thigars."

He might have gone on bidding to this day, but I escaped from him by darting through the barrack door. I desired to join my regiment properly dressed, and did not mean to exchange good clothes for a suit of "slops." Sergeant Parrot was evidently disappointed, for he must have been expecting a commission on the business with old Jeck ; but when he saw that I was unshakable in my resolve, he ended, as usual, by veering round and giving me good advice. He told me that when I reached the depôt I must ask leave of the officer commanding my battery to have my clothes sent to my friends, as I should thereby avoid having them sold at one of the regimental auctions, which are managed by the provost-sergeant, and which, according to his opinion, were mere swindles. Moreover, I must look very sharp after my watch and my money, as I should assuredly be robbed if I did not.

This allusion to money reminded me that I had promised to give the sergeant another half-sovereign before I went, and I accordingly did so. He in his turn handed me 7s. 6d., being my pay for six days from the previous Wednesday, minus sixpence, the price of the dinner to which he had treated me. Then he introduced me to five fellow-recruits who were going to Sheerness with me. There was Edward Grimall, *alias* "the moper ;" an ex-city-clerk, who went by the name of Farkin, and who displeased me at first sight, having fawning manners ; and three youths of the working class, one of whom, a strapping fellow called Bob Wilde, would have looked a perfect imbecile but for a trick he had of winking whenever your eyes met his. This lad's clothes indicated the direst poverty. He had rusty

hob-nailed boots, worn down like wedges at the heels; corduroys patched at the knees, and quite smooth from grease; and a thin, torn coat, too short for him in the arms, and buttoned high, so as to conceal a ragged collarless shirt, and the bit of whipcord which did duty as braces. Bob Wilde had no socks or waistcoat, and used the cuff of his sleeve as a pocket-handkerchief. He had a cap from which the peak had been torn off, and which was planted at the back of his head, so that his thick matted hair of a dullish brown sprouted from under it in all directions like a furze-bush. This curious pauper, who might have sat for a caricature of Indigence, and who would have been condemned by any average crossing-sweeper, as likely to bring discredit upon the profession, had he been seen handling a broom in public—this Bob Wilde favoured me with one of his winks (which I mistook for a nervous twitching of the eyelid), and asked in a lamentably humble voice if he might carry a novel and a newspaper which I had under my arm. I mention this because, from the moment when I accepted his services, he became my faithful attendant, and remained such for a long while afterwards. And a better servant no man ever had. I little thought at the time when I handed Bob Wilde my parcel, out of charity, that he might earn a shilling on easy terms, how knowing a personage he was, and how valuable a helpmate he would prove to me.

We were to start for Sheerness at two. The sergeant and I drove down to Victoria Station in a hansom about an hour before the time, that we might have some luncheon in the refreshment room. The rest of the party marched down under the escort of another pensioner. Whilst I was treating my excellent Parrot to a parting glass, I thanked him for his civility, and he drank my health, wishing me speedy promotion. Then he bantered me bluffly about

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the "young widder" in the police court. "I thought you was going to slip away from me that time," he said, with a twinkle in his eye. "Be careful about the females, sir: you'll find lots of 'em in the married men's quarters at barracks, and a doosed nice life their husbands 'll lead you if they find you're a poaching kind of chap. Ha, ha!"

This was Parrot's last word of counsel. A few minutes later my companions and I were all installed in a third-class carriage, with our enlistment papers and railway tickets. The train was just starting when a tallish man, having the appearance of a tradesman, entered our compartment and took his seat in a corner. "Detective," whispered Bob Wilde, audibly, as he gave us winks all round. Farkin, the city-clerk, changed colour and his knees shook. The "moper" fixed a cool brazen eye on the intruder, and whistled; but the detective who was detected looked the most uncomfortable of the party.

It seems to be a frequent custom, if not the general rule, to send detectives to spy upon parties of recruits; but I have never heard of a criminal or a deserter being caught in that way. There is something in the aspect of a detective which betrays him at once to the watchful eyes of such persons as Bob Wilde. The official in our carriage alighted at the first station, looking sheepish, and having made nothing of us, though he had once or twice cast timid glances at me. After his departure Farkin brightened up wonderfully, and began to brag of having been mixed up in great city speculations which had failed. He had friends in the army, though, who were going to help him on. Two of his uncles were captains. He was a perfectly honest man, only a bit fond of pleasure and so forth. Thus he went on till we reached Sittingbourne, and changed trains. The "moper" said little, but spat blood once or twice, and was evidently in worse health than he appeared to think. Though I

knew him to have been a pickpocket, I felt somehow a greater confidence in him than in Farkin, whose garrulosity was loathsome. He did not seem to be a coward; and, though his face had been so hard in the detective's presence, its settled expression was rather prepossessing. Edward Grimall did not boast of his antecedents. He borrowed my newspaper, and read it so long as there was light to see by; then gazed out of the window, absorbed in thought, and sad thought, judging by his features.

It was close on six o'clock before our sluggish parliamentary train brought us into Sheerness. A young bombardier in a shell jacket and white pouch-belt was waiting for us at the station, and took charge of us and our papers with a cheery greeting. "Now then, boys: stand still while I count you. Six: that's the right number. All right; come along sharp. This way."

We had hardly left the station when a formidable explosion resounded, and made the valiant Farkin skip into the middle of the road with fright. "What the dickens is that?" he yelled.

"Oh, you'll get used to it soon," laughed the bombardier. "It's the garrison 'ticker,' or gun. Goes off like that at twelve o'clock and six, to help us regulate our watches. Some of us call it the 'Oh my!' because that's what the girls scream when it pops off unexpected. Now then, who wants to stand me a drink? Don't all speak at once."

We had, of course, halted before a "public."

CHAPTER VII.


MY FIRST NIGHT IN BARRACKS.

A FIRST night in barracks is, like the first at school, a thing to remember ; and to those who have been at school, it is like going to one of those places over again. The reality is in some points better than one's anticipation of it ; in others worse. You may have prepared yourself for a great deal, but you find on settling down that many of your fears were groundless, while you have to reckon with several inconveniences which you had not contemplated. What these inconveniences are depends on the character of each recruit, for things which seem hard to one man are just those which may suit another.

I had prepared myself to pass immediately under a stringent system of discipline ; and being quick of temper, had resolved that my sharpest trials would come from having to submit without murmuring to the orders of coarse and insolent non-commissioned officers. But I found among those whose orders I had to obey more good-nature than harshness, and a general disposition on the part of all in authority to saunter through their duties easily. The military harness in England is strong, but it sits loosely on the wearer. There is no fretting from ill-adjusted straps or useless buckles, as in continental armies. Abroad, privates salute non-commissioned officers ; in the British army they

do not, and this makes a vast difference in the tone of the whole service. Sergeants and corporals live on familiar terms with their men, and get more respect than they actually appear to exact. It is a respect based on reason rather than on fear, and is vouchsafed in a more or less degree according as the non-commissioned officer is expert in his duties and discharges them sensibly. Before I went to sleep on this first night in my barrack-room cot, I had already detected several matters in which, as I fancied, authority might have been more strenuously exercised than it was; but in this I was presuming, as men often do, to be wiser than those who were experienced in the responsibilities of commanding. It requires more sense than some might suppose to wield even the light authority of a bombardier with efficiency.

On our arrival we were all taken before the pay-sergeant, to have our names and religions entered in the brigade books. The pay-sergeant and his bombardier-clerk sat in a very small room (which was the sergeant's sleeping-chamber), made hot by a big fire and a flaming gas jet. The pair gave themselves no airs, and got through their business as expeditiously as they could, being eager to get off to tea. One recruit said that he had no religion that he knew off. "You're Church of England, then," said the sergeant, and wrote him down as such. Another affirmed that he was a Baptist; but he was told that the spiritual requirements of her Majesty's forces were provided for under three heads only—the Establishment, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian—so that he was entered as a member of the Scotch Kirk, and I hope found its doctrines to his taste. Bob Wilde, before confessing his religious faith, nudged me to ascertain what mine was, and we were both put down to the English Church. Had I described myself as a Roman Catholic, he would have



done the same, as he afterwards told me, for it was "all one" to him.

Now the bombardier who had met us at the station, hurried us off again to our new quarters. We descended some stairs, went up others; met a number of soldiers, whistling, singing; peeped into some barrack-rooms where men were furbishing accoutrements for to-morrow's parade, whilst others were toasting bread or bloaters at the fire. We met women with baskets of linen, boys with bugles, gunners in heavy marching order, who had just been undergoing the delights of extra punishment drills. We passed by the band-room, where some desultory practice was going on; and at last we reached the room which is specially reserved for recruits until they have been "posted" to a battery.

We were pretty well out of breath by this time, for our guide had a trick of plunging down staircases with a headlong rush, as if he were sliding down a hill; and in going upstairs he cleared three steps at a bound. He was quite a rattling "non-com.," whose name was Fizzler. His yellow-braided forage-cap was lightly perched on the side of his well-brushed head; his jacket, with the red collar and gold stripe on the arm, fitted him as a mould; and his boots shone like looking-glasses.

"Now then, boys, make yourselves at home!" he cried, as we all tumbled after him into the room. "Choose your cots; and if any of you would like a little cold beef and pickles for supper, with a pint of beer to wash it down, you've only got to cut into the town and order at your own expense. The Queen has got no grub for you to-night."

We laughed. We were like new boys, ready to laugh at anything from a *senior*; and we were all pleased, I fancy, that her Majesty, though sparing in the matter of grub, had

at least provided a comfortable room for our reception. The apartment was large, airy, and brilliant with the double light of a glorious fire and gas. The walls were white-washed; the long deal table, the forms round it, and the boards of the floor, were so clean that they would have done honour to the scrubbing of a country housewife; and round the walls were ranged rows of cots or small iron bedsteads, doubled up, with the bedding at the top, folded in neatest array. These cots are so made that in the daytime each forms an easy-chair, the doubled-up mattress serving as back.

Whilst I was gazing on all this, my faithful attendant, Bob Wilde, had made a rush to the front, and promptly secured the two cots in the left-hand corner nearest the fire, marking his proprietorship by setting his cap on one and my novel on the other.

"Ah, you know the ways of the place, I see," said Bombardier Fizzler, observing him. "What might have been the name of the distinguished corps in which you served before, my lad?"

"Royal Marine Foot Guards — them chaps with the yellow overalls," answered Bob Wilde, quite unabashed.

"So I should think. That's the corps where the men sleep in cells, and do their drills on the tread-wheel, ain't it? Well, you know how to unlimber a cot, any way."

"Yes, bombardier, my mother taught me," replied Bob Wilde, with a grin.

"So much the better. Then you can tell these chaps what to do, and I needn't come back till bed-time. Ta-ta. I'm going to tea. It's a quarter to seven, and you fellows may go where you like till half-past nine."

He vanished, and Bob Wilde was left in virtual command of the room, until a few minutes later a rollicking Irish gunner came in, who introduced himself as the cook.

Cook's assistant would have been the correcter term. In each barrack-room the men take it in turns to act as cook's assistant for the week, fetching up the dinners from the kitchen, making the tea and coffee, and keeping the rooms tidy. They are in fact general servants *pro tem*. The cook in the recruits' room, however, has a permanent berth; and this Irishman, who was addressed as Paddy Mulligan, eked out his pay by little "tips," which were bestowed upon him by recruits for such elementary instructions as he gave them in regimental duties. As many of Mulligan's tips, however, were paid him in liquids at the canteen, that worthy had generally what Scotchmen call a "drap in the ee," sometimes draps in both ees. This was his condition now, and it made him uproariously friendly with everybody.

Like Fizzler, Mulligan at once "spotted" Bob Wilde for an old soldier, and the two exchanged hearty slaps on the back in token of good fellowship. I was simple enough to imagine that Bob Wilde must have left his former regiment in the regular way by purchasing his discharge, and he did not undeceive me; for when I asked him if that were the case, he answered, "That's it," with perfect coolness. Bob's manners had now quite changed. The look of indescribable poverty, squalor, and humility, which had excited my pity in London, had apparently been assumed; for now, in the congenial atmosphere of the barrack-room, he went about in his shirt-sleeves as if he were lord of the place. At the same time he was deferential to me, and lost no time in proclaiming that he was my "mate," and intended to "do for me." He began by asking whether he should go to the canteen and fetch me something to eat; but I declined, being minded to sally out into the town by myself, and kill the evening by dining in comfort.

Farkin, who seemed anxious to become intimate with me, wanted to oblige me with his company; but I was on

my guard against the fellow, and found my way out alone. Of course I took a wrong turning in going out, and rambled across a long parade-ground to the officers' quarters; then struggled on, and arrived at a guard-room; but a sentry sent me back about a quarter of a mile, and told me the right way. In time I discovered the best hotel in Sheerness, and had a quiet dinner in the coffee-room, near a table occupied by a party of naval officers. Afterwards I read the Kent county papers while smoking a cigar; and it was close upon half-past nine when I returned to barracks, wondering how long it would be before I again enjoyed an hotel dinner in civilian clothes, and in good company.

Our room was full by the time I returned. There were six other recruits besides those of our party—men who had come down the day before—and so, counting Fizzler and Mulligan, who slept in the room, all the fourteen cots were going to be occupied. Now came an ordeal which is always trying to recruits of refined habits, the having to undress in a room full of men whose habits are not nice, and whose conversation is the reverse of delicate. I scrambled through the process somehow, and turned in between a pair of roughish whitey-brown sheets, having first put my watch and purse under my pillow. Bob Wilde, stretched out in the cot next me, was smoking a pipe, and exchanging loud chaff with Mulligan. The bombardier was singing at the top of his voice; and the "moper," who had got a bed in the coldest corner near the door, was hacking his lungs with a terrible fit of coughing.

At ten a bugle in the yard sounded the "lights out" (four notes in a minor key, tot-toot—tot-toot), and Mulligan, the cook, forthwith turned off the gas. But to my dismay the talking and laughing continued in the dark, and the bombardier soon proposed that there should be a bout of story-telling. Mulligan led off with a ribald narrative

about a parson, a drummer, and a widow; and every now and then he paused to cry out "Boots!" whereupon all who were awake, or wished the story to continue, answered "Spurs!" Two or three other stories followed, stupid and foul, but after half an hour the replies of "Spurs" grew fewer and fainter, till at last Farkin, who had waded into a tale more disgusting than any of the others, talked himself out amid a general silence, broken only by sounds of snoring, and by the occasional coughing of the wretched "moper."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FREE KIT.

I WAS startled out of my first slumber by a heavy bump on my cot, and awoke to find Bob Wilde and somebody else cursing and fighting. It was pitch dark, but I could guess that Bob had caught his antagonist by the throat, and was shaking him like a rat. Then there was a thud like the falling of a mallet upon raw beef, and with a savage oath and cry of pain the invisible combatant beat a retreat, his bare feet pattering on the boards.

The fight had not made much noise, but it partially aroused the bombardier.

"What the deuce are you doing there?" he droned. "None of that larking here, or I'll put you in the guard-room." But upon this he turned over and went to sleep again.

"What's happened?" I asked in a whisper of Bob, thinking he and the other man had had a purely personal quarrel.

"It's a chap been trying to prig your things," answered Bob. "Just see if they're safe."

I groped under my pillow, and felt that my watch and purse were gone; but searching lower, my hand touched them on the floor.

"Who did that?" I inquired, in dismay.

"I dunno ; it warn't one of those chaps that came down with us. But I scored his mug for 'im, and I'll know him to'morror."

"Well; he's a cool hand, I must say. But I'm very much obliged to you, Wilde."

"I'm your mate, chummy, and nobody shall come faking among your things. But it's all square now; he won't come back again, and we can go to sleep."

This was all very well ; but it is not pleasant to know that one is sleeping in a room with a thief, and I could not imitate the easy philosophy of Bob, who snoozed straight off, as though nothing unusual had occurred. I lay on my back trembling, not from fear, but in sickened disgust at the degrading position in which I had brought myself by my folly. I wished that the thief would return, for I was purposed to teach him a sharper lesson than he had got from Bob, and show my new comrades at the same time that I was well able to take care of myself. But would it be endurable to remain in the service if such rogueries took place without exciting any surprise ? I thought of my father and mother, of my long series of blunders and fooleries, culminating in this utter disgrace of having fallen among the vilest scum of the country ; and I asked myself whether I should not do better to apply for my discharge in the morning, and return home as soon as I got it. The thirty pounds I had left with Mrs. Winkley would be enough to buy me out of the army, and the twelve pounds in my purse would clear my expenses home. The thought that I held my liberation within reach gradually consoled me, so that I dozed off once more and slept soundly.

I was awake the second time by a sound of general cackling in the room, as if a whole poultry yard full of furious cocks had been startled. It was nearly seven ; *reveillé* had sounded ; Mulligan the cook had lit the gas, set

the fire blazing, and had caught up his tin pail, to go to the kitchen and make coffee, when lo! he beheld that one of the recruits was missing. A man had decamped, taking with him Farkin's clothes and all the money which that well-connected individual had left loose in the pockets of his trousers. Then it was that the general cackling commenced. One missed a pair of boots; another a hat; but Farkin, as the heaviest loser, was thrown into a consternation that was piteous.

"Oh, Lor! there was five pounds in my pockets," he sobbed. "What shall I do? I haven't a penny left! Oh, Lor, five pounds!"

"What a d—d fool you were to leave all that in your trousers," cried Bombardier Fizzler, dressing himself. "It serves you right. I'm blown if it doesn't!"

"As if I could guess that you were all thieves here!" yelled Farkin, crying.

"It's the same bloke as wanted to prig my chummy's things in the night," remarked Bob Wilde, sitting up in bed; "but I gave him one on the costard that he'll remember."

"Why didn't you wake me?" ejaculated Fizzler, turning upon Bob. "I'd have bundled him off to the guard-room."

"Yah! yer wouldn't have marched off to the guard-room in the middle of the night; don't tell me," retorted Bob, with a shrug.

"Curse and d—n," now roared the bombardier. "Why, the blackguard has hooked it with my top-coat!"

Fizzler's outburst of wrath had something comical in it by contrast with the indifference he had shown to Farkin's loss. He stormed and swore with a vehemence which quite drowned the sound of Farkin's snivels. His face was purple with passion, and he got maddened when Farkin whined—

"You said just now it served me right. It looks as if you were flatter than I was."

"Hold your tongue, will yer, you stupid fool?" bellowed the bombardier. "You'll get a new kit presently; but I shall have to find a new overcoat out of my pay—a deuced nice thing, blank it."

"I don't s'pose they'll give me a new five-pound note with my kit, so I'm worse off than you," whimpered Farkin, full of resentment.

"Can't you catch the man?" I asked; for I should have been glad to have him apprehended on my own account.

"Catch him, be hanged," snarled Fizzler, who was in a humour for biting anybody's nose off. "The blackguard knows the ways of the place, I suspect. He could get out of barracks at six, and there's a steamer leaves for Chatham at seven. I'll be bound he's hooked it that way."

However, the bombardier hurriedly buttoned his jacket, caught up his cap, and rushed from the room, vowing that he was going to do his best to catch the thief.

Mulligan, who had gone to the kitchen, now returned with a basket of hot bread, and a pail full of steaming coffee, which shed fragrance through the whole room. Being told of the bombardier's loss, he fired off a volley of Irish expletives, and seemed sincerely disgusted, by which I became convinced that the theft was not such a common incident of barrack life as I had at first feared. Mulligan had a good heart, and bestowed on Farkin a proper amount of sympathy.

"Sure now, don't cry," he said, kindly. "Hasn't the thafe left ye any clothes at all? Bad luck to him! I'll lend ye some of my own."

We were all half dressed now, and some of the recruits were making awkward attempts to "limber" or fold up their cots. Bob Wilde had limbered his in a trice, and proceeded to show me how I must do mine and arrange my bedding. To effect this properly requires a little practice. The sheets

and blankets have to be folded in concentric circles, so as to form a shapely roll, which sits on the top of the doubled mattress, and is kept tight by a long strap passing round the mattress and the roll. The coloured counterpane is then folded square and spread as a cushion on the forward part of the cot, which is used as a seat during the day. While Bob was demonstrating this to me, Mulligan was performing the same good office for some other recruits, for the cots had all to be limbered up before breakfast.

This early meal consisted, for each man, of a bowl of excellent coffee well sweetened and just clouded with milk, and of a pound of new bread, that was to last through the day. Many indulged in butter besides, which could be procured at the canteen at the rate of a penny the pat, slightly salted and very good. It was Bob Wilde who ran down to fetch the butter for such as wanted it, and he good-naturedly gave the unhappy Farkin a pat. Of course the latter's mishap formed the staple subject of conversation as we all sat round the long table in our shirt-sleeves, munching our food, and everybody accepted his statement about the five pounds as genuine. I doubted myself whether he had lost more than twenty shillings, for he contradicted himself in giving accounts of his money; but, anyhow, the robbery of his clothes was a serious matter, for they were good clothes, for which he would have got at least a pound at the regimental sale; and such a sum is of consequence to a soldier. I was quite prepared to find that, having fixed upon me as the most affluent-looking recruit present, the ex-City clerk would apply to me by-and-by for a small loan, and I was not mistaken.

He did this after breakfast, when we had all trooped down to the washing-room in the yard to perform our ablutions. On a stone shelf, running all round the room, were a number of iron basins, and here a crowd of soldiers

from various barrack-rooms were lathering and washing themselves. The supply of water was plentiful, but as we recruits had not yet got our soap and towels we had to borrow these commodities. While my face was in the water Farkin sidled up to me, and in that fawning voice which I hated whined his request for the loan of a sovereign. He could repay this loan in a week, for he was going to write to his friends that morning, and they were respectable persons, etc. If I did this thing for him he would stand my friend eternally.

"I had rather you ask the money as a gift than as a loan," I answered, hesitating. "You ought not to say you can pay if you can't."

"But I can; I swear I can. Think what it is to be without a penny in one's pocket."

"But you will have your pay."

"Eightpence a day in cash—what's that? There are lots of little things a chap wants to buy when he takes to soldiering."

This might be true, and as I had never been close-fisted, I promised Farkin half a sovereign, for which he thanked me with fulsome gratitude. I may add that he was prompt to demand his money as soon as we returned to the barrack-room, lest I should alter my mind.

A busy day had now begun for us. The battery hair-cutter had come, and was shearing off Bob Wilde's redundant locks. We all had to pass under this operator's large slicing strokes, and those who had beards were ordered to shave them off, being left free to choose between wearing whiskers with a moustache, or moustache plain. About half-past eight Bombardier Fizzler returned in a vile humour from his ineffectual pursuit after the man who had stolen his overcoat. He first gave us our pay—eightpence apiece,*

* The pay of a gunner was 1s. 4d.; but 8d. was deducted for food.

growling all the while he did it ; then called to us to follow him down to the store-rooms. Here we were to be rigged out in uniform, and receive the multifarious articles which are comprised in a kit.

These kits are valued in the Artillery at about four pound ten, and a very good ninety shillings' worth we seemed to get. Let the reader judge, remembering that all the articles served out were of unexceptional quality. We were each presented with one tunic, one jacket, one overcoat, one cape, two pairs of cloth trousers with broad scarlet stripe, one pair of wellington boots, one pair of shoes (or cossacks), one busby with plume and plume-case, one forage-cap and chin-strap, one belt with sword bayonet, one pouch-belt and pouch, three grey flannel shirts, three pairs of woollen socks, three towels, one pair of braces, one pair of doeskin gloves, one shaving-brush, one hair-brush, one clothes-brush, two blacking brushes, one polishing brush, one razor and case ; one canvas hold-all, containing a comb, knife, fork and spoon, pocket-knife with buck's-horn handle, and a brass button-stick ; one box of blacking, one box of polishing paste, one knapsack, one mess-tin, and one large white india-rubber bag, which was to serve as a receptacle for most of the other things ; and, finally, a Bible and Prayer-book.

The eyes of some of the recruits, who were raw country lads, opened wide at the sight of all these treasures ; but no time was allowed us for a close inspection of their beauties, for we were due at the hospital at nine, to pass before the doctor. As soon as we had carried the kits to our room, where we left them on our respective cots, in charge of Mulligan, who was vigorously scrubbing the table and forms with soft soap, we hurried back to the store-room, where the quartermaster-sergeant handed us each an old overcoat, to be worn that day whilst our other things were

being marked. Then we trudged off to the hospital in our civilian clothes, but wearing our new forage-caps, and carrying with us each a flannel shirt, a pair of socks, a pair of trousers, and the old overcoat just mentioned.

The hospital at Sheerness is at about five minutes' walk from the barracks, standing in its own grounds on the opposite side of the main street. A number of patients, in blue hospital suits and woollen nightcaps, were leaning over the wooden balcony of the outer yard to grin at us as we arrived; and down below were mustered a good collection of gunners and drivers, who were reported as being on the sick-list. Some of them were suffering from ague, which is a common complaint at Sheerness, and looked very ill indeed. It was a shame to keep them standing in the cold as they were doing, because of the routine which requires a number of formalities before cases of sickness can be admitted into the hospital. Others appeared to be hale and jolly enough, and were larking about with an agility that made one marvel what their complaints could be.

All these soldiers on the sick-list had brought their full kits with them. This comes from another piece of routine. The soldier who reports himself sick, and goes before the doctor, is obliged to take his kit, in case his malady should prove to be of a sort that must detain him in hospital; but the absurd effect of this is that a soldier who simply wants a tooth stopped, or a splinter extracted from his little finger, must appear at the hospital with all his belongings, as if he were going on a campaign.

It will be remembered that I had only passed my medical examination in London by a fluke. Having now reconsidered that idea of buying my discharge which had tempted me in the night, I became apprehensive again about my eyesight; but seeing how grumpy our Bombardier Frizzler was, I scrupled to tell him of my misgivings and

bespeak his assistance. When we had been introduced to the doctor's ante-room, and had all stripped naked as worms, I noticed that the hospital sergeant—a middle-aged man in a black uniform—seemed an agreeable fellow; so I was moved to mention to him, in a confidential way, that although my eyesight was good in a general way, it sometimes failed me in counting dots at a distance.

"All right, old cock," said the sergeant, winking. "We know that story."

"What story?"

"Why, you were tested for eyesight in London and were found all right, and you've not had time to get blind since. Don't try to gammon me."

Everybody laughed, and I reddened with confusion. "You mistake my meaning, sergeant," I said. "I'm very anxious that the doctor shall pass me."

"Oh, he'll pass you right enough. Don't be afraid: he's up to all your tricks."

The doctor did pass me, after a very cursory examination, and I was forthwith vaccinated. All recruits have to undergo that operation. None of our party were rejected, except the poor "moper," who, without avail, had been making distressful efforts to keep from coughing. But the Sheerness doctor, like his London colleague, saw at a glance that he was consumptive.

"Why, my lad, you ought never to have come here," the doctor remarked, when he had applied the stethoscope to his chest.

"I've a slight cough, sir, that's all," answered the "moper."

"You call it a slight cough. H'm! I can't understand how they should have certified you in London to be of sound constitution."

We know that the "moper" had passed by purchasing

the enlistment paper of one Edward Grimall; but the doctor did not hint that he suspected this. "I must reject you as unfit," he said.

"Will you admit me to hospital, sir, until my discharge comes?"

"Oh yes, of course; that's the only proper place for you."

This was all the "moper" wanted, apparently. As we were donning our military attire and making up our civilian clothes into parcels, he had another of his awful coughing fits; but, when it had passed, he remarked cheerfully, "Well, I've got a berth for life now, any way."

"I hope you'll recover soon," I replied. "You must take care of yourself."

"I shan't be buried as a pauper," he answered in a satisfied voice as his eyes met mine. "I shall be carried to my grave with military honours. That's something to have enlisted for."

Poor fellow! he had this posthumous comfort soon enough.

CHAPTER IX.

I AM INITIATED IN SOME REGIMENTAL ABUSES.

I DO not purpose to indulge the reader with a narrative of my military life day by day. I have dwelt at length on the formalities of enlistment because they seemed curious to me at the time I passed through them, and are almost equally so to my mind now that I look back upon them. I am not likely to recover from the astonishment that was produced in me by the queer things I witnessed—the drinking, trickery, evasions of the law, and dishonesty already chronicled; and I have not ceased to ask myself whether the process of enlistment could not be rendered a little more reputable than it is. Perhaps I have an idea that the touting for recruits in public-houses and highways is not the best or the cheapest way to get a first-rate army; but when this has been said, I have only to add that I found as much of good in the service as of bad.

I was not more than a week settling down in the swing of regimental life. On my second day at Sheerness I was posted to No. 2 Battery of B Brigade, and put into a room whose bombardier was the best-natured fellow in the dépôt. He was a tall, long-shanked Scotch youth, named McLankey, who spoke with the richest brogue, and had a trick of laying bets which he always lost and never paid. He was thoroughly steady in conduct, but had no head for figures, and could never keep the roster of his room, much less

make up mess accounts, without assistance. At the time I joined his room he was in sore trouble because an Irish gunner called McRonagh, who did all his writing for him, was in "cells," under a sentence of six days for insubordination. So the very first words McLankey said to me were—

"Eh, mon, can ye read and write? I'll bet ye saxpence ye can't do a long division sum!"

I showed him that he was mistaken; and he cocked his head on one side with great satisfaction, watching my pen glide about the paper as a stork might observe the gyrations of a fly on the water. From that moment Bombardier McLankey held me in precious esteem, and had recourse to my services whenever McRonagh was not available.

The other men in our room deserve to be mentioned by name. There was Bob Wilde, who slept in the bed next mine; McRonagh, an extremely clever fellow, always in trouble; and two other devil-may-care Irishmen—O'Rourke, red-headed, and Boyle, whose eyes sparkled with mischief like a lynx's; a handsome youngster called Coxey, who belonged to the boat's crew that plied daily between Sheerness and the Isle of Grain, and on six days of the week wore sailor's clothes; and a blustering, grumbling churl named Yuffin, who almost always acted as cook, for he liked the work though he pretended not to do so, and was ever ready to take another man's week off his hands. Then came three simple louts, Jadson, Appledore, and Bunne, the first two of whom had been ploughboys, and the third a baker's apprentice; a stout man called Forringer, who was nicknamed the "gentleman," because he in truth was one; and our old friend the ex-City clerk, Farkin. These men, with myself, numbered thirteen, and there was one cot in the room vacant.

Bob Wilde had contrived to get put into the same room as I by merely saying that he was my servant—a position

which is not regular, but is winked at. His effrontery in asking for anything he wanted of "non-coms" * was notable, and so was his easy, gallant bearing in uniform. The first time that I saw him in his new regimentals I did not recognize him. Who was the shallow thinker who first said that the tailor does not make the man? Not Bob alone, but all the other recruits underwent transfiguration when they had donned their uniform, so that Jadson and Appledore the ploughboys, and Bunne the baker, developed physical perfections which had remained hidden under their sordid civilian attire, and shone forth like rough jewels that have been polished and well set. Even Farkin lost much of his sneaky appearance when his lithe figure was cased in a neat jacket, and when his forage-cap was set jauntily on the side of his head.

The uniform is so important a factor in the making of a soldier, that our officers were far more particular about what we wore than about what we did. So far as I could see, they left all the work to the "non-coms," and spent most of their time idling or going up to London. But they threw all their energies into the business of making our clothes fit, and during my first ten days in the service I was inspected six times by the captain of our battery before he passed my uniforms as satisfactory.

Major Frederick Dandimont was this officer's name. He had brevet rank as major, and was a small, dapper, much-whiskered gentleman, with a blotchy face and watery eyes, who constantly wore an air of having sat up all last night in dissipation. He put a great deal of scent on his handkerchiefs, and was a renowned lady-killer, walking with a strut and dressing within an inch of his life when in plain clothes. But he was a brave, kind, and just officer, very popular, and by no means such a fool as he looked.

* Non-commissioned officers.

Standing erect in a line, we recruits tried to look at home in our clothes, while the major in his speckless patrol jacket strolled along and pointed out the imperfections which his watery eye detected. To everything he said, the master tailor (a sergeant), who followed him, answered, "Yes, sir," and scored a chalk mark on the defective part.

"Now, look here," exclaimed the major, tapping me on the chest for the fifth time, but ignoring me personally as entirely as if I had been a tailor's dummy—"look at this man's chest! He wants a great deal more padding here. And I'll be bound his trousers bulge out. Turn round."

"Right - about face, there," hollared Sergeant-major Harden of No. 2 Battery, a loud-voiced man, of whom more anon.

I faced round.

"Yes, you could clutch a whole handful of spare cloth out of his trousers," said the major. "Just see."

The master tailor grasped me firmly by the seat of the pantaloons, as if he meant to lift me from the ground. "Yes, sir," he answered, and embellished that portion of my raiment with a white circumflex accent.

"Is his collar easy?" continued the major.

"Yes, sir," replied the master tailor, answering for me, and inserting a horny finger between my collar and throat, as though he meant to throttle me. "Yes, sir, he's quite comfortable."

"That will do then," said Major Dandimont.

The result of all this was that my clothes were taken back to the tailor's shop four or five times, and that I had to pay a few shillings for alterations. This is one of the little abuses of military life that should be remedied. Government contracts to give a recruit a free kit, by which is obviously understood a kit of things fit to wear; but the clothes served out from stores can seldom be worn without

alteration and padding, which ought not to be charged to the soldier. Again, all the articles of a man's kit have to be marked with his name and regimental number, and the soldier is charged for this a halfpenny per article ; so that, what between marking and alterations, a recruit during the last week of his first month in barracks has sixpence a day of his pay stopped, and much grumbling ensues.

Another grievance comes from the insufficient quantity of clothes served out with the kit. A German soldier has six suits of clothes ; * our soldiers need not have so many as this, but they ought to be provided with a third, or slop suit for fatigues. Three days after my arrival I was ordered with a party of other men, in the afternoon, for coal fatigue. We started with shovels and baskets, and spent a couple of hours transferring the contents of two coal-carts into the coal-yard. Now, coal-dust is not the best thing to improve new facings. When the fatigue was over, the yellow braid round my forage-cap and the broad red stripes down my trousers were covered with a black coating, fine as soot, which when brushed left grey smudges. I had to take the trousers into the tailor's shop to be cleansed (cost three-pence), and I should have bought a new band for my cap, but that my mentor, Bob Wilde, advised me to buy a complete suit at the next sale of deserters' effects.

"If yer've any money to spare, yer ought to 'ave a fatigue suit," said he. "There are fatigues every Saturday instead of drills ; and perhaps yer'll be sent to clean the church, or to mess about the officers' quarters with a mop and pail, or yer'll have to do your week as cook, and find your-

* The *Kriegs garnitur*, kept in stores, and only used in war ; the *Parade garnitur*, for grand reviews, also kept in stores ; the *Sonntags garnitur*, Sunday best ; the *Dienst garnitur*, or service suit, for guards and drills ; the *Haus garnitur*, to be worn in barracks ; and the *Arbeits garnitur*, for fatigues.

self in soft soap and greasy water up to the elbows. Yer can't keep clean without a third suit; and then yer should buy a few other trifles so as to show a full kit on inspection day."

There was a kit inspection every Friday. Just before dinner each soldier laid out on his cot every article he possessed. At the top of his mattress he set his clothes, busby, and cap; on the front part of the cot his boots, belts, side-arms, and his knapsack, hold-all, brushes, etc. At the foot of the cot stood the india-rubber bag, so displayed as to show the owner's name. At about twelve an officer came, with the battery sergeant-major and sergeant, and walked slowly round the room. Every soldier stood at "attention" beside his bed, ready to answer questions. As the things had all to be laid out in a particular order, the officer could tell at a glance whether anything was missing, and lost articles had to be replaced at the soldier's expense, besides which punishment was sometimes inflicted for negligence. The articles most liable to be mislaid were the knives, forks, and spoons in daily use; combs and razors, which men borrowed from each other; and towels, which they occasionally left in the washing-room, where they got stolen by soldiers from other rooms. Consequently it was well for a soldier who wanted to get through his kit inspections every week in comfort, to buy a spare knife, fork, and spoon, a comb and razor, and at least one towel out of his own money. In this way he was able to keep his hold-all thoroughly furnished, and earned a character for being a clean and careful soldier—the most valuable character to have.

I was naturally anxious to reward Bob Wilde for his many helpful little offices, and for the great service he had rendered me in saving my watch and purse from theft. So, taking advantage of his advice about extra purchases, I

handed him a sovereign to do with as he pleased. He coloured to the roots of his hair at this gift, and vowed that I was a gentleman whom he would serve with pleasure so long as the sun and moon endured. Then, a look of hesitation stealing suddenly over his face, he asked me whether I wouldn't mind keeping ten shillings of the money, and giving it him by doles as he might apply for it. If he retained the whole sovereign now, he should probably go on a spree that night, return to barracks, sleep in the guard-room, and be none the better for his lark on the morrow. "Tain't good for a chap to have too much money all at once," said he, with self-conscious philosophy. "It's better to take it out in little bits, and make the fun last."

"Well, but shall you be able to get yourself a fatigue suit with ten shillings?"

"Oh, that'll be square enough," answered Bob. "I can get a thing here and a thing there from some of the old sodgers, and win summut, maybe, at blind hookey. D'yer play keards?"

"Not much."

"Better not try till yer know all the dodges. Some of thim old sodgers would rinse yer out in no time; but they can't come it over me."

I must add that the next evening Bob sidled up to me and asked for two shillings, as he "wanted to buy a ribbon for his gal." On the morrow his gal wished for some gingerbread nuts, and so on. Five successive evenings Bob got a two-shilling piece and made merry thereon, returning to barracks at ten, full of beer and singing. However, he did manage to collect the materials for a fatigue suit somewhere, though it is not to be supposed he paid dearly for them. I, for my part, purchased what things I wanted at the next regimental sale.

There was always one on Mondays, after dinner. It

took place outside the clothing-stores. Going down to one of the yards, I found a throng of old-clothes men and old women with hook noses scrutinizing the cast-off garments of recruits. I had none to sell, for Major Dandimont had given me leave to have my clothes sent to London; but I was interested in watching the very expeditious fashion in which Nodge, the provost-sergeant, conducted the auction. The provost-sergeant is a kind of sheriff in barracks. He has charge of the cells and of prisoners; he is chief of the military police; and in the flogging days he used to superintend the erection of the triangles, and teach drummers how to ply the "cat." Old Nodge was a red-faced, grizzly veteran, not very soft in his manners, or civil. He was better known to the bad characters in the brigade than to the good, and his cold blue eye was suspiciousness itself. In guise of an auctioneer's hammer he held a thick cane, which he rapped on the pavement to conclude the sales. He had a direct interest in running up prices, as he received a halfpenny per sixpence on every article sold.

After the recruits' things had been cleared, some effects belonging to deserters were produced, and I began to bid. As at most other sales, the professional buyers formed a ring, and forced up prices so as to prevent outsiders from getting anything too cheap. I was made to pay dearer for my purchases than if I had been an old-clothes man with a hook nose. However, for thirteen and sixpence I bought a jacket, cap, and a pair of trousers in tolerably good repair, along with a knife, fork, spoon, and other things. Old Nodge's fee on this transaction was one and twopence.

I found my fatigue suit most useful, but I thought, and still think, that it was unfair I should have had to buy it. Luckily I could afford the outlay, but there are soldiers who cannot; and what generally happens to the impecunious recruit is this: after he has been a few months in the regi-

ment his jacket grows shabby, and his captain orders him to get a new one. This costs seventeen shillings, and if he have to buy new trousers too, this makes ten shillings more, so that the luckless fellow is put on a daily stoppage of sixpence for fifty-four days. Many soldiers sicken of regimental life then, and desert. I should think that four out of every five cases of desertion were due to pay stoppages, which the men consider arbitrary, for I have seldom known a man desert while drawing his full pay. There would be a good deal to say in favour of fixing a gunner's daily pay at sixpence instead of eightpence, as it is now nominally, but in letting him have this sum regularly, without any deductions whatever, except as a punishment for wilful damage or gross negligence. This would be the surest way to encourage habits of steadiness and thrift among the well-disposed soldiers, who, as things go, are often disheartened from saving by the precariousness of their pay. The present system costs the Government extravagant sums through desertions. I shall have a tale to tell presently, of how one of my room-fellows, the red-headed Irishman, O'Rourke, went all to the bad through unjust stoppages, and cost the country, in one way and another, more than a dozen contented soldiers would have done.

CHAPTER X.

A DAY'S BARRACK LIFE.

OUR life in barracks was cheerful enough, for almost every hour in the day had its occupation, and it was not till evening that a soldier could indulge dull thoughts, if he had any propensity that way.

At six o'clock in the morning *reveillé* sounded—a long, tuneful bugle-call, which, pealing in the darkness of a wintry morn, when the weather was cold, was not always welcome music: least welcome to those who were undergoing the punishment of confinement to barracks, which obliged them to turn out at half-past six, in heavy marching order, for an hour's extra drill. How often have I heard the Irish contingent in our room, O'Rourke, McRonagh, and Boyle, curse this hateful necessity, for they were more frequently in trouble than other men; and, by their account, everybody was to blame for this except themselves.

The cook was always the first to rise, and Yuffin was mostly cook in our room. He was a pale-faced, cantankerous fellow, for ever growling; but nobody feared him, for he was a coward. There was some sympathy for him, however, on account of his being a married man who had no "indulgence;" which means that he had married before enlisting, so that his wife was not recognized by the authorities and was denied the privilege of residing in barracks

and drawing rations of meat, bread, and coal, like the wives of those soldiers who had married in an orthodox fashion, with the colonel's leave, after serving seven years. Yuffin's wife was a sempstress, who resided in the Blue Town of Sheerness, drawing sixpence a day of her reluctant husband's pay; and Yuffin was suspected of liking the post of cook, as it enabled him to levy little perquisites out of the rations at his disposal, as well as out of the coal-box. For all his irrational grumbling, he got through his work well. As soon as he was up he lit the gas, kindled the fire, and clattered downstairs with his coffee-pail. As he did all this very noisily—out of sheer spite against mankind, so far as one could see—everybody would be broad awake by the time he made his exit.

Then the men would stretch themselves lazily on their couches, curse Yuffin, and yawn. Saturday was the only time when they turned out of bed sharp, for on that day the floor of the room had to be swabbed and scrubbed before breakfast. But on ordinary days Bombardier McLankey set the example of dawdling, and it was not till after half an hour's self-communing that he mustered energy enough to rise, exclaiming, "Eh noo, ye a'; get up, will ye!"

I had learned to limber my cot, and could now fold my bedding as neatly as Bob Wilde himself; but I allowed Bob to polish my boots and furbish my accoutrements, for he could do this much more expertly and quickly than any man who had not been trained to menial offices from his youth. Breakfast over, we took it in turns to shave before the two small looking-glasses which our room boasted; and by this time a tubful of potatoes would be brought to our door, and somebody would sing out, "Spud practice!"

"Spuds" are potatoes, and "spud practice" is the paring of these esculents. Our room was linked for mess

purposes with that adjoining us, which was commanded by a corporal ; and as potatoes furnished forth a part of our ordinary, each man was expected to peel at least as many of them as he would eat. This was only fair ; but many shirked this obligation, especially the three Irishmen, who devoured potatoes more largely than all the other men, and our bombardier was too weak-willed to coerce them. I was careful, however, to go out with my knife at the first call, and sometimes I pared away for a whole half-hour, thereby avoiding reproach. As a "gentleman" I could see that I was anxiously watched, and any evasion of duties would have exposed me quickly to hostile comments. The men esteemed me for having a mate who valeted for me, but they would not have esteemed me had I disdained to touch potatoes otherwise than with my knife and fork when properly roasted or boiled, as the case might be. Instinct taught me this from the first, and I acted accordingly.

But my first "row" in the service took place on account of potatoes ; and I have cause to remember it, for it gave me the opportunity of establishing my footing in our barrack-room somewhat sooner than I had expected.

During my first fortnight I had kept very quiet, observing everything that went on, and endeavouring to learn without asserting myself in any way. But I noticed that the Irishman McRonagh was usurping an authority over us that was not pleasant. He was a tall, swarthy fellow, with a face that would have been handsome but for the devilish temper that was expressed on it. I believe he was a gentleman's son, for he had received a first-rate education ; but he was a thorough scamp, about whom there were ugly stories current—stories of thefts in barrack-rooms which could not be brought home to him, but which had left him under a cloud with the authorities. He was, moreover, so passionate that he had twice been tried by regimental court-martial

for clenching his fist in the face of "non-coms;" and this had barred his chances of promotion, notwithstanding that he had got a first-class certificate in the school, and was qualified by his attainments and proficiency in drills to be a sergeant-major, or even an officer. McRonagh, by keeping our bombardier's accounts for him, had acquired a complete ascendancy over the latter, and used it in a domineering way to skulk his share of barrack-room work whenever possible, and to put on a great deal of "side" with us recruits.

One morning, when I had been paring five or six times more than my allowance of potatoes, I left the tub to go down to the washing-room, for it was getting near parade time. A few minutes later McRonagh came down, flourishing his towel, and cried with a volley of oaths, "Why the devil don't you fellows look after the spuds? Dickson, ye haven't touched a spud this marning."

This was too rich, considering that my hands were still covered with the soil of the potato-skins. "Go and do some peeling yourself," I said. "I was working half an hour while you smoked your pipe."

"That's a lie," answered McRonagh. "I'll take mee solemn oath ye haven't fingered a raw spud this week."

"Your oath isn't worth much then," I answered.

McRonagh made no reply; but coming to a basin next mine, which was filled with dirty water, he savagely overturned it so that half its contents were dashed over my trousers and shoes. I thought it useless to parley in such a case, so, catching up my own basin, I dashed the gallon of soapy water it contained full into my aggressor's face. He reeled, sputtering and belching out a torrent of blasphemies. "D—n yer sowle, what did ye do that for?"

"Because you did it: we're quits now."

"I'll quits ye!" roared McRonagh, livid with fury; and,

seizing his iron basin, he sent it whizzing at my head with such force, that had it struck me I must have finished my day, and perhaps my life, in the hospital.

There were twenty soldiers in the washing-room, and they turned round with wet faces to watch the affray. The red-headed O'Rourke, who was a toady of McRonagh's, playing jackal to his lion, yelled, "Go it, by Jabers, Roonie!"

But I had already made the hot-tempered Irishman repent of his assault. While the basin was still bounding and clattering with an unholy noise on the flags, I had planted a couple of straight blows on McRonagh's face and a thud on his stomach. He tried to parry; but he could not box. I could. I applied the science I had picked up from the boxing-master at Angelo's in St. James's Street, and in a couple of minutes had administered to my bully what his friend O'Rourke called "the father of a bating." Half an hour later McRonagh was sent off parade for appearing there with a black eye and a swollen nose; but Sergeant-Major Harden, who had heard the particulars of the fight, said it "served him dooced well right," and gave me an approving nod, as I marched off to drill with my squad.

McRonagh never forgave me his thrashing. He swore sullenly all that day that he would be revenged, and subsequently tried to play me some scurvy tricks, which will have to be chronicled in their place.

Our parade for drills took place at half-past eight, but before marching on to the parade-ground we mustered by batteries in the different yards, and were inspected by our respective sergeant-majors, sergeants, corporals, and bombardiers. He who has never seen a soldier brushed for parade does not know what cleanliness is. Not only must one's clothes be free from any speck of dust or fluff, but the

hidden nooks under the straps of one's knapsack must have been carefully wiped, and every part of one's carbine and side-arms must glisten. The carbines are held on the slope, with the breeches open, and the sergeant-major, going down the line, applies his eye to the muzzle of each barrel. He expects to see the insides of the barrels gleam like mirrors, and the outsides clear of any of those spots which indicate that rust has lain there. A smart soldier, after he has been out of doors with his arms, always wipes them with a greasy cloth as soon as he gets indoors; for, if he neglects this precaution, the damp that may have settled on them will give him trouble when he cleans them in the evening. Again, though arms are polished overnight for the morning's parade, the soldier should never forget to wipe them lightly in the morning with his polishing brush, so as to remove the film of dust that accumulates in the night. Failing this, he will be dismayed to find, when he flings his breech open, that it looks quite grimy, and if he stoops to blow away the dust he only makes matters worse; for, the breech being oily, the dust adheres to it, and the dampness of the man's breath will produce rust on the parts which are unoiled. I acquired a knowledge of these things very speedily; and, though Bob Wilde always polished my arms for me, I did the wiping and brushing of them myself, so as to run no risks through his possible forgetfulness. In this way I escaped the rasping reproofs which Sergeant-Major Harden launched at the heads of less prudent recruits.

This sergeant-major had a deep bass voice, which could crash through the open air like the notes of an ophicleide. He had been twenty years in the service, and had campaigned in every clime. His face was like a bull-dog's, and his frame tough as oak. He was the model of what a "non-com" should be, for, though he was exacting about smartness, and stormed hard as if gusts of passion were blowing

from his mouth, he was seldom angry, and his bark was worse than his bite. When he was fairly satisfied with his inspection, he used to shout, "Now, I want to see them 'ere stomachs in a line. We ain't at a cattle show, and some of you's a deal too fat. Dress up, there, can't you, No. 5? No. 3 file, you want your 'air cut. Eyes front: there ain't any gals about for you to go staring all over the shop. Off you go, now, Form fours! By your left, quick ma-a-arch!"

We used to march on to the parade-ground to the invigorating strains of the dépôt band, which played popular tunes. The men were drawn up by batteries, each having its sergeant-major to the left-hand front, and the brigade sergeant-major then passed his inspection, calling out the numbers of the batteries and receiving from each sergeant-major the answer, "All present, sir." Brigade Sergeant-Major Burlow was a magnificent "non-com," six feet high, who wore a sword like the officers, and was addressed by all the other "non-coms" as "Sir." He appeared to be the real commander of the garrison; for the lieutenant-colonel in nominal command was scarcely ever seen, and the other officers made themselves extremely scarce on the drill ground. As a rule, only one of them showed himself at parade, and he would stand apart with an air of dignified boredom, as if the proceedings only concerned him remotely. When Sergeant-Major Burlow had received from the bombardier orderlies the lists of the men who were on the sick list or on leave, he presented them to the officer, made the military salute, and received the order, "Fall out for drills!" Upon this the batteries would break up into squads, falling in upon different parts of the ground under various instructors, and during an hour and a half the drills were carried on, hoarse words of command cleaving the air in every direction. But all this while it was Sergeant-Major

BurLOW who discharged the duties which in foreign armies devolve upon an officer of senior rank—going from squad to squad, watching, exhorting, encouraging, blaming. It was he whom we regarded as our true chief, and revered for his thorough efficiency. The officer on duty did absolutely nothing but saunter about with his hands behind his back, consulting his watch from time to time to see if the moment had come for dismissing us. Let me be just, however, and acknowledge that there were some officers who earned our grateful thanks for the readiness with which they dismissed us from parade whenever the weather was bad. There was in particular a young stripling, fresh from Woolwich Academy, Lieutenant Fowle, who wore a double eye-glass, and was reputed a man of science. He was of such weakly constitution that the least breath of east wind set his teeth chattering. So in the winter months this “chicken,” as we nicknamed him, used to wave his white-gloved hand to the bugler as soon as he decently could, and we were generally dismissed half an hour before the proper time.

The broad parade-ground, skirted on one side by the dockyard, on the other by the ramparts overlooking the Thames, used to offer an animated spectacle during drills. Here might be seen a squad of recruits being taught the goose-step; further on, some others, in a more advanced stage, were performing pole drill, with hop poles; in another corner of the ground rows of men marched and counter-marched with knapsacks, but without arms; hard by, a company were being drilled with carbines and sword bayonets; and then there were the men who had reached the last stage of instruction, and were being taught gun-drill, sighting, rolling cannon-wheels about, etc. It is needless to remark that a drill could be made pleasant or the reverse, according as one fell under an instructor who was patient, or one who raved and lost his temper. There

were rather too many of the latter sort ; but on the whole the drill sergeants and corporals were indulgent, except when they had to deal with stubborn fools, or with soldiers who wanted to lark in the ranks. Delinquents of this kind were sometimes ordered to fall out, and would be marched before the officer, who, waking up for the occasion, would administer a rebuke, or punish with a few days' "confinement to barracks," according to his mood and the gravity of the offence.

As I had been in rifle corps at Harrow and Cambridge, I was pretty well versed in my marching drills, and I put forth all I knew from the first. This greatly disgusted Bob Wilde, who would have had me conceal my proficiency, in order that I might linger in those raw squads, whose members have an easy time of it, doing no guards and being exempt from the fatigues of gun-drill. I told him, however, that I was ambitious of promotion ; hearing which, he observed that there was no accounting for tastes, and excused himself for not emulating my example. So he was still labouring through his goose-step with great inner contentment (for he knew as much of drill as any sergeant) by the time I had been drafted into the gun squad, about a fortnight after joining. It often made me laugh to see the mistakes he purposely committed by way of convincing his instructor that he was a "new hand."

We had a second drill parade at half-past one, and between whiles we got our pay and had dinner. Betwixt morning drill and noon, there was often some business to be attended to, either signing of account-books, or kit inspection, or casual fatigues ; but now and then we had two hours to ourselves. At a quarter before twelve the bugler sounded for "cooks," and there was a rushing down of the cooks from all the rooms, with iron dishes, to fetch the meat and potatoes from the kitchen. On most days of

the week we had baked meat and potatoes ; but the fare varied, and was both good and ample as a rule. Sometimes we had pea-soup in addition to the meat ; now and then curry, meat-puddings, or meat-pies ; and frequently on Sundays plum puddings. Our mess, consisting of twenty-seven men in two rooms, was not among the best managed, however ; for the corporal in the next room was a conceited person who had no talents for catering, and our good-natured bombardier, McLankey, was a simpleton. A great many more potatoes than were wanted were cooked every day and wasted ; and the bones which might have been used as stock, and have furnished us with some excellent soup every day, were wasted too, or became the perquisites of Yuffin. In abler hands our mess fund might have yielded better results than it did, though much of the extravagance complained of was of the sort which seems inherent to the national character of Englishmen. A Frenchman would have exclaimed to see such waste ; but Englishmen squander without compunction as much as they eat, and grumble after all that they cannot live so well as the French, who live cheaper.

It is a good rule in the service that men must sit down to dinner in uniform, with their jackets buttoned up. This ensures a certain amount of tidiness in the meal. We ate out of crockery plates, and drank our beer or water out of slop-basons. Government allowed us sixpence a week for canteen money, besides our pay ; and this was enough to afford us a pint of very drinkable stout apiece on three or four days a week. Those who wished to make sure of getting their beer, however, had to look out very sharply for it when it came up in the can, for the Irish contingent were much addicted to swilling more than their quanta. McRonagh's measurement of a pint extended to a quart when he was measuring for himself, and the red-headed O'Rourke meted

out but half a pint when he was pouring out for anybody save himself.

While we were at dinner, we used actually to be honoured with an officer's visit. A sergeant would scamper up the stairs, fling the door open, and shout, "Tention!" then an officer bobbed his head in, screamed, "Any c'plaints?" and vanished. Not more than two or three officers had the condescension and good feeling to walk into the rooms decorously, and to articulate the words "Any complaints?" with propriety. The majority of those who took it in turns to go round seemed in such a violent hurry to get off, that one was left to wonder what on earth was the business that engrossed their attention? There is a pitiful affectation about many officers, a desire to show off, an offensive snobbism, which would perhaps be corrected if these gentlemen could hear the remarks that are made about them behind their backs. Soldiers speak respectfully of good officers; but the officer who gives himself airs may rest assured that his manners, foolish peculiarities, and private circumstances are amply discussed and satirized in the barrack-rooms, by critics whose wit, though coarse, is pretty pungent. I remember that one day a Captain Coltigern, the most arrogant officer at the dépôt, was in such a hot haste to finish his rounds, that, as he whisked off, his sword scabbard got wedged in the doorway, tripped him up, and gave him an ugly fall. The titter that broke out as he hobbled away with a sore shin must have tingled disagreeably in his ears.

What used the men to do in the spare hour that followed dinner? Many of them flocked to the canteen to smoke a pipe and drain a pewter; all the jolly souls did this, and accounted a man a "Methodist" who abstained from joining them regularly. There was a convivial promiscuity in their way of drinking out of one another's

pots, for no man ever ventured on so mean a proceeding as to keep his tankard to himself. The pewters were passed round and round till they were empty, and the more of them came the merrier. It often happened that, when soldiers were flush of cash, faces would get pretty hot, and tongues would be raised in loudish disputes and extravagant wagers by the time the "fiddler," *alias* bugler, brayed out his call to afternoon drill.

The post-prandial parade was like that in the morning, barring the music of the band. There was the same minute inspection of our clothes and arms, and Sergeant-Major Harden, if his "missus" had given him such a dinner as to put him in a good humour, would reiterate his adjuration to "keep them 'ere stomachs in." It was said that when the conjugal bill of fare did not suit the sergeant-major's appetite, he used to make up for it by taking a glass of something hot in the sergeant's mess afterwards, so that he always stormed less in the afternoon than in the morning. The drills lasted till three; but at four all privates who had not got a third-class certificate, and all the "non-coms" who had not a second-class one, had to fall in again without arms, and were marched off to the schools. To many of the men the hour's daily schooling was like a recreation: I am afraid that to most of them it was, for all practical purposes, a farce.

It was a tedious farce as regards the illiterate men, for the classes were too big to enable the teachers to give anything like real instruction to men who knew nothing. I have seen soldiers who had been ten years in the army, and had done perhaps more than two thousand hours' schooling in that time, without having learned to read and write. The men who knew something fared a little better, for pains were occasionally taken with them, and they could at least practise the three R's till they had attained the not

very high standard required for a third-class certificate. The schoolmaster was a Mr. Slocock, a gay old fellow with a red nose. He ranked with a brigade sergeant-major, and on Sundays wore a nondescript uniform, half military, half civil, without a sword. He had a staff of assistants, whom he chose as he pleased from among the bombardiers, and the berth of a school-teacher was somewhat coveted, for it carried with it ten shillings a month extra pay and total exemption from all drills and guards.

The schools were large and commodious buildings, situated in two blocks near the married men's quarters; and they were only required for the soldiers during an hour of each day. From nine a.m. until four p.m. they were used for the children of the married soldiers and "non-coms," the girls being in one block and the boys in another. Mr. Slocock and his assistants who taught the boys had their hands pretty full of work, and the old schoolmaster made it his maxim to instil knowledge and good manners into his young charges by an unsparing and fatherly application of the birch.

Unfortunately he could not teach them to pronounce their *h*'s, for he scattered these aspirates about in a manner that was remarkable for its ingenuity, in putting the right thing always in the wrong place. He was a man of fair education—just fair and no more; but he had the sense, at least, to abstain from pretending to teach men who knew more than he did. There was a dozen of us at the *depôt* who could have proved poor Mr. Slocock an *ignoramus*, had we been so minded; but we formed a class apart, who were tutored by the chief assistant, Corporal Rivett, an unfortunate man who had been a naval officer, but had got cashiered and ruined for going on shore contrary to orders whilst his ship was in the harbour at Malta. Under Rivett, who was a consummate mathematician, my school hours were not

wasted, for I brushed up my Euclid and algebra, in view of the December examinations ; and was trained besides in writing the regimental hand—that is, a plain, bold, legible hand with every letter carefully formed, which is more valued in “non-coms” than any gentlemanish writing.

When school ended at five o'clock, the soldiers had finished their day's labours (unless they were ordered for night picket), and could rush off to tea, or betake themselves into the town or recreation-rooms, as they listed. But the evening's amusements of the military do not come properly under the heading of service, and will have to be treated of apart.

CHAPTER XI.

I GET INTO A NICE SET.

ONE evening I had gone into a shop at Sheerness to make some purchases, when I saw a mild-looking elderly gentleman standing by the counter, while two young ladies, evidently his daughters, were buying something. I paid no particular attention to him, and he made no remark to me. When he had gone out with his daughters, the shopwoman laughed and asked me if I did not know my own colonel.

"Was that the colonel? I never saw him before. I shouldn't have taken him for an officer, though, by his shabby hat and old inverness."

"I wondered why you didn't salute him. It's Colonel Spilman. He doesn't dress very well, but he's a very nice gentleman."

Colonel Spilman had as little to do with the recruits in his dépôt as the head of a university college with his undergraduates. The difference between him and a university don was that, instead of devoting his leisure to classical studies, he gave it all to cricket. Though past fifty, and a feeble-shanked old fellow in appearance, he was a capital bowler and a safe bat; so that all through the fine season his services were in request for cricket matches. He belonged to half a dozen clubs, and travelled all over the country as one of first-rate teams; and when such duties

as he had recalled him to Sheerness, he got up matches there.

There was a fine, large cricketing ground at Sheerness for the use of the garrison. It lay beyond the hospital, and in winter Colonel Spilman used to walk down every day to take a look at it. A corporal, named Slooper, had been told off especially to have charge of the ground, and he had scarcely anything else to do. He was himself a brilliant cricketer, who played in military matches, and used often to travel with the officers, getting all his expenses paid him, and a guinea a day, sometimes more, for every match. Corporal Slooper kept his cricket-ground as a lady does her drawing-room. Every Saturday he had a fatigue party down to pick off pebbles and rubbish from it; and during the season the rolling and watering he gave it were incessant. It was part of Slooper's very light business to ascertain what cricketing talent there was in the dépôt, and to report good players to the colonel, who looked after their interests in ways they little suspected. Many a soldier was kept from going to keep garrison "over the water" in the hated Isle of Grain, or was struck off the lists of Indian drafts, simply because he was an adept in the colonel's favourite game. Colonel Spilman was so fond of cricket, that during the months when he could not play he was busy compiling statistics of the past season's matches; and he cherished a secret ambition, which was to get up a Sheerness military eleven that should defy all comers. It was jokingly said that he had made a vow not to buy a new hat until his unconquerable eleven to come had beaten the county of Kent, and that this accounted for the shabby head-dresses he wore when out of uniform.

I happened to be a fair cricketer myself, and having become acquainted with Slooper at the recreation-rooms, convinced him of my interest in the game. The cricketing

season was still far distant ; but the corporal took note of me, and this fact led first to my being introduced into the pleasantest set of the barracks, and, secondly, to my becoming acquainted with Colonel Spilman, and deriving much benefit from his patronage.

Slooper and a number of other men who were gentlemen by birth, or who had received good education, used to meet every evening in the recreation-rooms to play at whist, and they formed a set quite apart from the other soldiers. Their language and manners were different ; they had subjects of conversation beyond the ken of ordinary soldiers, and they were bound together by the common bond of occupying a position below that for which their education had been intended to fit them.

I am sorry to say there were blackguards among them ; and it did not make their case any better that they were smooth-spoken blackguards, of dissipated tastes, who had come to grief through the turf and champagne bottles, and not through the gin-shop. On the other hand, there were some very good fellows. Slooper, one of the handsomest men I had ever seen, was the son of a solicitor, and had been educated at Westminster. His home had been rendered unhappy by his father marrying, for a second time, a woman of shrewish disposition, who was jealous of her husband's children by the first marriage. Reginald Slooper having failed to pass a difficult examination for the Indian Civil Service, his stepmother had reviled him in such abusive terms as an idle vagabond, that he had left home in disgust and taken the Queen's shilling. His father was very fond of him, and used to correspond with him in private, sending him an occasional five-pound note ; but Slooper had refused all offers to buy his discharge.

I have already spoken of Rivett, the assistant to Mr. Slocock the schoolmaster, who had been an officer in the

navy. There was another ex-officer in our set, Bertram Forringer, who was in the same barrack-room as I, and slept in the cot next mine. Forringer had been in the —th Hussars, and owed his ruin to an act of folly, committed one night when he had taken a glass too much at mess. He and some other officers had entered a Baptist chapel in their mess uniforms whilst a service was going on, and one of the number (not Forringer) had thrown a hassock, which hit the preacher on the mouth. The congregation rose at the offenders, but all the officers escaped except Forringer, who was overpowered, and marched off to the police-station, where he was charged with assault and brawling in a place of public worship. The affair caused so much excitement in the town, that the magistrates got infected by it, and sentenced Forringer to seven days' hard labour, without the option of a fine. As a result, the wretched fellow was, of course, dismissed the service, and his relatives, taking the harshest view of his case, refused to befriend him in any way, beyond paying his debts and giving him two hundred pounds to begin the world again with. Forringer was not this man's real name. He had changed his name on enlisting; and, indeed, he had taken his misfortune so much to heart that he scarcely ever spoke of his past life, and I had been sleeping near him for a month before I learned that he had been an officer. Unfortunately for him, the officers of the dépôt were aware of his antecedents, and I cannot but think that Forringer was wrong to hang his head as he did, for people are accustomed to treat a man much according to the respect which he shows for himself. If Forringer had held his head high, and not sought to hide that he had committed an error which he was ambitious to retrieve, the officers would doubtless have helped him, his own friends would have been mollified, and he would soon have got a commission again. As it was, he looked so

ashamed of himself that the officers assumed a canting air whenever he passed them, and they had denied him even such poor recompense for his good conduct as it would have obtained in the case of any other man. Forringer had been passed over twenty times when he had deserved promotion, and he was not yet a bombardier, though he had been two years a gunner. At the time when I made his acquaintance he had begun to give way to despair, and had taken in a deliberate way to drink as a cure for his melancholy. It was a most lucky thing for him that he had only eightpence a day, for he spent every penny he could spare in beer or gin.

I must mention one other man of our set, as he was for a while the life and soul of it. He had enlisted under the name of George Tudor, and was as diverting a companion as one could wish to meet. He could sketch, play the piano, talk French, sing comic songs, and tell laughable anecdotes by the score. He was strikingly handsome, with large, dark, sparkling eyes full of intelligence; he was always gay in temper and smartly dressed, and had he been born with a title and fortune would have been accounted the beau ideal of an aristocrat. Unluckily he was but the natural son of a peer, had been loosely brought up, as it is the curse of boys in his equivocal position to be, and had all the vices as well as the talents of bastards. He had been twice in prison for swindling (though none of us knew it), and had enlisted so as to elude the pursuit of the police, who were after him for forgery. His rise in the service had been quick, for he was a corporal after having been but twelve months in the Artillery. I shall have to tell what occasion he took for showing the army a clean pair of heels; but so long as he remained amongst us he did much to enliven those nightly meetings of ours, for which the recreation-rooms were so pleasantly adapted.

These recreation-rooms are an admirable institution; and

really, when one considers how much is done for the British soldier, what comforts he has, what good fare, good housing, and good pay, in comparison with the soldiers of foreign armies, one can only conclude that the enormous number of desertions from our service, and the bad spirit which prevails in it, come from our unsatisfactory method of recruiting. The recreation-rooms at Sheerness (and I have seen finer ones elsewhere, *e.g.* at Woolwich) would have been regarded as a boon by the officers of many continental armies. They consisted of a block of buildings, two stories high, which stood to the right as you entered the barrack gate. On the ground-floor was a long room, with several bagatelle-boards, and a number of small tables with games of chess, draughts, and dominoes. A notice pasted over the mantelpiece stated that no playing of cards for money was allowed, but this rule was disregarded, though money was never actually put on the tables. In a corner of the room was a refreshment counter, kept by the armoury-sergeant and his wife, who had charge of the rooms, and where soup, tea, coffee, oranges, pastry, and other such things were to be had, but no intoxicating liquors.

On the first floor was another long room, with a stage at one end, where, every Tuesday evening, entertainments were given, either private theatricals, or concerts with negro minstrelsy, comic songs, clog-dances, and so on; or sometimes an officer would give a lecture with dissolving views. At ordinary times this long room was used for newspapers, of which there was as ample a selection as in the reading-room of any large London hotel. Half a dozen London morning papers, three evening ones, the comics, the weeklies, the illustrated journals, and the principal magazines lay on the tables from ten a.m. to ten p.m., and as in winter there were always large, jolly fires in the two rooms, and plenty of armchairs, a man could be as com-

fortable there as he pleased. In connection with the reading-room was a lending library, containing several hundreds of novels, books of history and travel. The subscription to the recreation-rooms (including the library) was twopence a month only ; but there was a charge for the Tuesday night entertainments of one penny for standing room, and twopence for the reserved seats.

As may be imagined, these Tuesday entertainments, which were entirely conducted by the soldiers, afforded scope to such of them as had histrionic abilities. Corporal Slooper was of the number ; but the most successful performer of all was George Tudor. He acted and sang so well, he was so inimitably funny when he blackened his face, he was so ingenious and amusing in playing women's parts, and he could be so tender in little sentimental pieces, that on nights when he was announced to appear the seats appropriated to officers and their wives were always crowded. The armoury-sergeant, who made some profit out of the entertainments, set high store by Tudor, as a manager does by a popular comedian who "draws ;" and he had got him the appointment of librarian — a "berth" which relieved Tudor of all regimental duty, and left him with his time free for amusement and adventure.

Tudor took a quick and strong fancy to me, and not knowing anything about his antecedents, I reciprocated it. He told me a cock-and-bull story of his having entered the army because his father had wished to put him into the Church, a profession not to his taste ; and he made no secret about his father being a peer, though he pretended that there had actually been a clandestine marriage between my lord and his mother, and that he hoped to be in a position to prove it one day, and take his seat in the House of Lords. Assuming all this to be true, I thought it highly honourable in Tudor that he should have elected to earn

his bread as a soldier sooner than be a charge upon his mother, "or," as he said, "accept a penny from that man who has used her so ill."

It was Tudor who initiated me to such "life" as there was in Sheerness. He seldom dropped into the recreation-rooms till about eight, and between five o'clock and that hour used to roam about the town in pursuit of two or three love affairs which he had on hand, for he was as incorrigible a Lothario as if there had been Italian blood in his veins. He was always well supplied with money, and spent it freely, which he explained by saying that he earned several pounds a month by contributing military articles to the London press. This was to a certain extent true, as he wrote very well, and several of his contributions had been inserted in magazines; but he would have had to work more diligently than suited an idler of his stamp to earn all the money that he squandered. Most of Tudor's resources were levied under the form of love-offerings from the different maids and matrons to whom he paid courtships more assiduous than honest.

Sheerness is bisected by a long straggling street, which at its lower half, as you come from the station, becomes part of what is called the Blue Town. In this Blue Town was a small hotel and public-house, the Post Captain, kept by a widower named Kurney, who had an only daughter. The house was well frequented by the better class of non-commissioned officers of the Artillery and Engineers, by warrant officers of the navy, and by naval officers, for whom, as for respectable civilians, there was a special coffee-room. The bedrooms were almost always let to naval officers, and the house enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for giving good entertainment, old Kurney being a conscientious landlord, who cared more for the good name of his house than for any profits he might make by sharp practice and overcharges.

Old Kurney's daughter Rose was not a pretty girl by any means, but George Tudor had completely turned her head by his flatteries. The wench dressed above her station, gave herself fine-ladyish airs, and would do no work, except stand behind the bar and fish for compliments as she gave customers their change. But these absurdities might be forgiven on the score of her passionate love for George Tudor. She loved him so distractedly that her life was a torment on his account. If he failed to come at his usual time in the evening she would rush out twenty times in an hour, and stand in the doorway to watch if he were coming down the street; and when at last he arrived she could hardly refrain from flying at him and kissing him before anybody who might be in the bar. He had a cheerful, fondling way with women, which made them think they could manage him like a child, whereas he toyed them all round his little finger. He was a great kisser and caresser, and gave them as much praise as they could swallow.

Old Kurney knew all—or thought he knew all—about the goings on of Rose with George Tudor; but the corporal's stripes on the latter's arm imbued the old man with respect, for he fancied that a young fellow who was said to be on the fair way to becoming a sergeant must needs be steady. He would have desired nothing better than that George should marry Rose, to succeed him in the business; and among the frequenters of the house it was imagined that this event would soon take place. As a consequence, Tudor was regarded with some envy by his superiors the sergeants, for there was many an honest fellow of a dozen years' standing in the service who would have esteemed himself in great luck to get the Post Captain as his wedding portion, no matter what the personal charms of the bride might be. Meanwhile George Tudor was received in the house as if it was his own. He ordered what he liked with-

out paying for it ; and Rose used continually to slip money into his pockets which she had taken from her father's till.

Tudor had once or twice invited me to tea at the Post Captain. When we came we used at once to be shown into the parlour behind the bar, so that we might be free from intrusion ; and in this little snugery, where a copper kettle sang merrily on the hob, our wants were affectionately catered for. Fresh, strong tea, buttered toast nicely browned and soddened, poached eggs, and deliciously curled rashers of bacon formed very agreeable meals ; and while we ate, Rose Kurney would hang over her lover's chair, gloating over every button in his uniform, and hearkening to his every word as if it were music. Thinking I had only been invited to play gooseberry, and ought to make myself scarce now and then, I used to go out into the bar after tea and smoke a cigarette ; but one evening Tudor told me, laughing, not to do that.

"She gets quite unmanageable when we're alone," he said. "Egad, I don't know how to talk to her ; she clings to my neck as if she were drowning."

"She seems very fond of you. I suppose you will marry her some day?"

"Marry her?" he echoed, as if resenting the question. "What could a gentleman do with a wife of that sort? She's good to play with—not to make a wife of."

I was not enough of a moralist myself to combat this view, but I asked Tudor whether he had never thought of advancing his fortunes by marriage. I remarked that he was more likely to succeed in such a speculation than most men.

"Oh yes, I've thought of it," he answered, flushing with pleasure at the implied compliment to his face and talents, for he was plumed all over with vanity like a peacock. "To tell you the truth, I'm paying my addresses to a retired

merchant's daughter in this place—a very pretty girl, with lots of money. I dare say you have seen her in church: she sits in the third pew from the door, downstairs on the left.”

“Yes, I’ve seen her: she wore a sealskin jacket last Sunday. Her name is Miss Truelove, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s an expressive name—eh? and she deserves it. But how come you to know it?”

“I heard one of the officers speak to her as we were coming out of church.”

“Oh, that fop Dandimont, I suppose,” replied Tudor, with a slight frown. “He needn’t dangle after her, though, for it’s no use. She meets me in the garden of her house at evening. I’ll ask you to come with me some day and keep a look-out. However, I’ve some other strings to my bow if she should fail.”

We were walking towards barracks, and he suddenly stopped before a showy hosier’s shop.

“One of my strings lives here,” he said, with a laugh. “I call her ‘the Cable,’ because she’s so stout—not to her face, though.”

The shop was kept by a stout, florid dame of forty, named Mrs. Plummidge. She was not quite a widow, for her husband still lived, but he was a lunatic in confinement, and was not expected to live long.

“Resigned unto the heavenly will,
His wife kept on the business still;”

and she was anxious to take George Tudor into her shop as assistant, with an ulterior view to matrimony. She had, in fact, made him the same offer as Mrs. Winkleigh, the London tobacconist, had made me; but there was no comparison in point of attraction between her and my pretty, natty Laura, and I really did not feel as if I could compliment Tudor on his choice of Dulcineas. Mrs. Plummidge

was fat, coarse-featured, red in the face, and hot-tempered. Being aware of Tudor's gallivantings with Rose Kurney, she was jealous, and used to upbraid him every time he came with shrill reproaches. But five minutes of his blarneying always restored her to good humour ; and I believe she would have cut off her brown hair to buy the scapegrace cigars with, if she had had no other means of supplying him with pocket-money.

But the "Cable" was well off, and not only gave Tudor money, but useful things out of her stock too—shirts, neckties, cambric handkerchiefs, socks, etc. There was a room upstairs which was reserved as a dressing-room for him, and where he kept some suits of civilian clothes—gifts of the doating widow, who sometimes used to go with him on Sunday outings to Rochester and Chatham. On such occasions she liked him to go dressed "as a respectable young man," for she had the English middle-class horror of uniforms, and would have felt ashamed of walking even with a sergeant-major of Horse Artillery, all braided with gold lace. Her aversion to the military in general caused her to look by no means amiably at me when I entered her shop with George Tudor.

"Well, I suppose you've been drinking as usual at the Post Captain?" she screamed from behind her counter. "A pretty place to go fuddling yourself in night after night!"

"When did you ever know me fuddle myself, my beauty?" said Tudor, holding out his white-gloved hand with a charming good grace. "You know that if this house were an hotel it should have my exclusive patronage."

"I know you don't drink, George," she answered in a mollified tone ; "but" (looking significantly at me) "there may be some who do and might lead you into it. I'm not the one to object to any man having his quiet glass of an

evening, but you might as well come and take it here, where it would cost you nothing."

"I wish I could, my dear Maria," said Tudor, quite seriously, "but we non-commissioned officers have to meet at the Post Captain every night to discuss regimental business. You know I always slip away as soon as I can and come here. Am I not here now?"

This conversation was taking place in the shop, for Mrs. Plummidge kept no grown-up assistants to spy upon her. She only had an ugly niece, who was dependent on her, and a boy of fourteen. When we had passed into her parlour, Tudor closed the door and gave her a kiss.

"Now then, Maria, dear, give us a glass of sherry each; and try to look less sour at my friend here, who's a gentleman—Mr. Dickson."

"Gentlemen don't take to soldiering unless they've misbehaved as such," retorted Mrs. Plummidge, who probably wished me a good way off. However, she gave us the sherry, and had been cajoled into graciousness before we left.

As we returned to the recreation-rooms, Tudor had a good laugh at his "Cable," but protested that she was a kind soul whom he cherished as a grandmother. "There's nothing like women to help you on in the world," he added complacently. "If that old thing likes to fall in love with me, she's welcome. It puts a little bit of romance into her life." And in his blithe tenor voice he carolled—

"If my partner squeeze my hand,
I know what I'm about;
It pleases her and don't hurt me,
I'm the jolliest chap that's out."

CHAPTER XII.

A BARRACK-ROOM FIGHT AND A COURT-MARTIAL.

I HAD been foolish enough to tell Tudor that I had been at Harrow and Cambridge—for I had more than the proper dose of vanity too—and it was from that moment that he became so friendly with me. He always cottoned to men who could give him accurate information about the haunts and habits of the upper classes ; and had long ago pumped out of poor Forringer everything that the latter could tell him about the life of an officer of Hussars, fox-hunting, and the turf. As men are easily led on to talk about things that interest them, especially when they have an intelligent listener to deal with, Tudor had soon pumped me likewise about my school and college life. It did not occur to me that there was anything suspicious in his curiosity, for he frankly confessed his regret at not having been at a public school and university himself, and used to listen with ill-concealed envy (always so flattering to a narrator) to descriptions of things which he wished he had known from personal experience. I observed, however, that he was gifted with a retentive memory, for he learned to speak to me about Harrow and Cambridge as if he had been there himself. He remembered even the slang of these places.

Being a corporal, Tudor held charge of a barrack-room ; and as we belonged to the same battery, he wanted me to

exchange into his room from mine. I should have been glad to do so for some reasons, as Tudor's was a well-governed room ; whereas ours, thanks to the ascendancy which McRonagh had over our weak bombardier McLankey, was very ill managed. But if I had gone to Tudor's room I must have been parted from Bob Wilde, and I knew this would mortify my useful servant exceedingly, should he learn that I had been consenting to the change.

Paddy McRonagh had not forgiven me the punishment I had administered to him in the washing-room, and tried to pay me back in small change under the form of little acts of spite and malevolent insinuations. I bore with his conduct as long as I could, not wishing to be thought of a quarrelsome temper ; but as the two other Irishmen, O'Rourke and Boyle, sided with him, while Forringer and Bob Wilde of course took part with me, there was a breach in our barrack-room destructive of harmony. A firmer-minded bombardier could have set matters straight, had he been so minded ; but McLankey was too much indebted to McRonagh for his clerkly assistance to quarrel with him, while the other men in the room regarded our hostility as amused spectators, hoping it would culminate in a shindy. I had to make up my mind at last that on the first serious provocation which McRonagh offered me I would teach him a second lesson, which should once and for all reduce him to good behaviour.

The opportunity did not come soon, for McRonagh was afraid of me ; but one day he got Yuffin, the cook, to play me a dog's trick in a way that appeared as if he had not instigated it. The bugle had sounded for afternoon drills, and I was running downstairs, well brushed like my companions, when Yuffin, who was going to sweep out the barrack-room, as was customary after dinner, came out on to the landing with the cocoa-nut door-mat. His intention was to go out

and shake it under the gallery which ran along the outside of the barrack buildings to the rear; but McRonagh, leaving the room just at that moment, gave him a nudge, and Yuffin, understanding the hint, shook his mat over me above the stair-rails as I descended. The result was that I got covered with dust and loose fibres, though I did not notice it until I was on parade.

As ill luck would have it, we were inspected that day by our battery sergeant, a cross-grained fellow, as surly as Harden, the sergeant-major, was jovial. Halting opposite me he halloed, "Why haven't you brushed yerself?"

"I did get brushed, sergeant, but——"

"Don't answer me. I tell yer ye're not brushed. Yer look as if yer hadn't been brushed for a week. Ye're as filthy a soldier as ever came on parade."

"Please, sergeant, somebody shook a mat over him as he was coming down," whispered Bob Wilde, who stood a few files off.

"Who asked *you* to talk?" barked the sergeant, turning sharp upon him. "D'yer think we're at tongue drill? Just keep that mouth of yours shut, or you'll talk in the guard-room presently."

Here Sergeant-Major Harden arrived on the scene. It was one of his good dinner days; he had well eaten and drunk, and was mellow, though bellowing like a bullock.

"No-ow then, what's a-all this about? Why don't yer get yerselves brushed? It strikes me most of yer didn't know what a brush was till yer 'listed. One of these days I'll have yer all out on parade with yer brushes, and make yer brush each other for a hour like so many hostlers a-grooming of donkeys. Dickson, fall out, and go and wipe that dust off."

These last words he said kindly, and I saw that he understood that an accident had happened to me, and

wished, by generalizing the reproach of untidiness, to lighten the blame from my own shoulders. I was, nevertheless, much annoyed; and, as Bob Wilde had passed up the word to me in a whisper that Yuffin was the culprit, I ran upstairs, two steps at a time, with a vindictive purpose upon that worthy. I found he had just finished tidying the room.

"Yuffin," I cried from the threshold, "just bring your brush and give me a brush down."

"All right, chummy; all right, I'm coming," he answered, with an ironical show of polite alacrity intended to disguise his uneasiness at my tone.

I said not a word as he gave me a thorough valeting from cap to boots; but when he had finished I turned round, swinging my arm with a gesture that made him start three paces back. I hesitated half a second as to whether I should slap his face, and he turned sickly sallow in anticipation that I should do so. But I had no time to lose, if I wished to get back to my place before our battery marched off to the parade-ground; so I contented myself with shaking my head and fist at him. I had a presentiment that he could not be the real culprit, for he was too much of a cur to have attacked me for his own pleasure.

I had half suspected that Sergeant-Major Harden would not march his battery on to the parade till my return, and I was right. The kind old fellow had walked up and down the ranks, examining this man and that, righting a strap here and a buckle there, so as to give me time to get back, and save me from the mishap of arriving late on parade and being called up before the officer on duty to give a reason. It is no slight thing in the service to have a superior who will go out of his way to pull you from little scrapes; and I must do Harden the justice to say that he only favoured me because he knew that I had not deserved to be "checked." He had no mercy for slovens and skulkers; but if once you

had established yourself in his eyes as a soldier anxious to do your best and to get on, he was your friend.

After drill, Bob Wilde came up to me with another gunner, who said he had seen McRonagh nudge Yuffin and urge him to shake the mat over me. Bob's advice was that he and I should both go and give the Irishman a thrashing together ; but I did not want his assistance for such a job. McRonagh did not show up in the barrack-room after drill, and soon afterwards we had to fall in for school. But after school Forringer, Bob, and I returned to the room together, and found McRonagh, with the two other Irishmen, Yuffin, and Bombardier McLankey, gathered near the fire. They were evidently in expectation of an assault, and McLankey was so nervous about it that he screamed to me as soon as I came in, "Noo, a willna have any fighting here. Dickson, ye mustna be fashed, mon, because a carpet was shaken over ye by mistake."

But I had made up my mind not to strike the first blow, for Forringer had cautioned me that if I did so I should put myself in the wrong. McRonagh might "put in a crime" * against me for assault, and the officer before whom I was brought would infallibly convict me, for it was the invariable practice of officers to decide against the man who struck first. I therefore merely took off my jacket to be prepared for emergencies ; and having done so, informed McLankey that the mat had not been shaken over me by mistake, and that it was his duty to inquire how the cook came to be shaking a mat over the staircase at all, whether by accident or not.

Hereat a violent altercation arose, and Yuffin swore that he had never shaken a mat. McRonagh took his oath that I had never been dusted. The red-headed O'Rourke

* "Put in a crime" means to prefer a charge. Every military offence is a "crime."

and Paddy Boyle, who had not been witnesses of the occurrence, swore that they had seen the whole thing, and that I had got dirtied by slipping downstairs on my back. In the midst of these perjuries, uttered with the most filthy oaths, Bob Wilde made his way to the fireplace to toast some sally-lunns I had bought for tea. He had as much right to the use of the fire as anybody else, but McRonagh, standing with his legs stretched before the grate, said he would be cursed if the room should be used as a cookshop. Bob shoved the fellow aside; but Boyle, who burned for a row like a true Tipperary boy, stretched out his foot and gave Bob's knuckle a kick which sent the sally-lunn into the cinders. Bob was not the man to stand this, and knocked Boyle down. The next minute six of us were all involved in a scrimmage.

Forringer and I should not have joined in the fight, if Bob and Boyle had been left to settle their differences together; but O'Rourke and McRonagh had both flown to their countryman's assistance, and so we went to Bob's. Boyle, in tumbling over a form, had bumped his head on the corner of a cot, and was badly hurt; O'Rourke, unable to make head alone against Forringer, had, like a coward, caught up a lump of coal from the scuttle, and flung it into his antagonist's face, inflicting a deep cut and covering him with blood. But McRonagh did worse, for with his devilish temper he could never fight fair. He seized a carbine from the wall, and drove Bob back with a tremendous blow on the chest with the butt, then clubbed the weapon and was going to strike me. If I had not closed with him rapidly, I should have had my head broken. The force of my onslaught throwing McRonagh off his balance, he fell across a cot; but, fastening his teeth savagely in my left arm, he bit me till the blood spurted. Maddened with pain, I pounded his face with my right fist till Bob Wilde

clutched him by the throat and, forcing his mouth open, parted us.

By this time the noise of our fight had attracted a crowd of men from other rooms, and several sergeants from their mess-room, which was just below us. Very luckily for me, Sergeant-Major Harden came among them.

McLankey was yelling at the top of his voice that he would make a prisoner of Bob Wilde for being the author of all the mischief. Never did native weakness and self-interest conspire so miserably to make a villain of an ordinarily good fellow as in this case; for McLankey was ready to perjure himself against Bob, Forringer, and me in order to save McRonagh, who did his accounts for him. But Sergeant-Major Harden knew his Irish contingent of old. He had caught McRonagh actually holding a carbine, and learned that the weapon had been made use of against Bob. He also ascertained from eye-witnesses that O'Rourke had flung a heavy lump of coal into Forringer's face. Accordingly, shouting for silence with his leather lungs, he made prisoners of these two. But, to my indignation, he ordered Bob into custody also.

I tried to put in a word for my friend, but was told to hold my tongue. "You charge Wilde with having begun all this, don't you?" said Harden, addressing the bombardier.

"Yes, he waur the beginner; then Forringer and Dickson joined him afterwards," screamed McLankey, quite beside himself at seeing McRonagh apprehended. "I wouldna tell ye an untruth, sergeant-major."

"Very well, then I make a prisoner of him," said Harden; "but, mind you, it will be the worse for you if you're caught committing perjury before the officer to-morrow. And, by-the-by, you're behindhand with your roster to-day; let me have it clean made out by to-morrow morning, or I'll put in a crime against you for neglect of duty."

McLankey knew that he would not make out his lists without McRonagh's assistance, and sat down overwhelmed. Half a dozen men and a bombardier had been sent to fetch their side-arms, and now returned to escort the prisoners to the guard-room. Bob Wilde went gaily, saying he should be set free on the morrow ; but McRonagh looked murderous ; and O'Rourke was marched off, protesting that the throwing of coal was all a "meeshtake—an accheedent bee Jabers, and nothing more."

When they were gone, the sergeant-major looked at my arm, and ordered me off to hospital to have it dressed. The wound was very deep, and had bled so profusely that I felt faint, and had to get some brandy and water from the sergeants' mess before starting. A soldier was sent with me ; and when I reached the hospital, the hospital-sergeant, having dressed my wound, detained me for the night. Next morning, the surgeon saw me, and said I must remain in hospital at least three days, but I was allowed to go out with my arm in a sling to give evidence at the examination of the prisoners.

It was Major Dandimont who conducted the examination, and very well he did it. The prisoners were marshalled abreast, bareheaded, in front of our wing of the barracks ; their escort behind, with drawn sword-bayonets. The witnesses stood in a line with the prisoners, but a little apart from them, with their caps on.

McRonagh's face was hideously disfigured by the pummelling I had given it ; O'Rourke and Bob Wilde had each a black eye ; Forringer, who appeared as witness, had his head bandaged.

We were not examined on oath, but on our words. McLankey was the first to give evidence, and he prevaricated, retracting most of what he had said on the previous night, denying that he had said it, and making a mess of

his words altogether. Then Forringer spoke, and as usual was coldly listened to. My own evidence was heard with much more attention than the ex-officer's, and with some sympathy, owing to the bite in my arm. When Boyle and Yuffin had also been heard for the defence, Sergeant-Major Harden summed up all our accounts by his own version of the affair; and when he had finished, he ordered McLankey to take off his cap, and charged him with remissness in keeping his accounts (that unfortunate clean roster had not been forthcoming), with neglect of duty in allowing a fight to take place in his room, and with untruthfulness. On his side, Major Dandimont ordered Yuffin and Boyle into custody, and charged the first with shaking a mat over me wilfully, and the second with having begun the barrack-room fight by kicking Wilde on the knuckles.

In the upshot Bob was discharged, as he had not struck Boyle until kicked; Yuffin and Boyle were sentenced to six days' confinement to barracks, with punishment drills; O'Rourke was committed to be tried by regimental court-martial that day, and McRonagh by district court-martial on the morrow. O'Rourke, being arraigned half an hour later before three officers, forming the regimental court-martial, got six days in cells; but McRonagh, having committed an aggravated assault with arms, stood in much graver case. The district court-martial, presided over by the colonel, sentenced him to twenty-eight days in cells, with hard labour—a sentence which was confirmed by the general in command of the military district of Woolwich, to whom the findings of district courts were referred.

As for Bombardier McLankey, he was "sent back to duty;" in other words, reduced to the ranks. As he was only an acting bombardier,* this could be done without

* An acting bombardier gets private's pay; a full bombardier, 1s. 4d. a day, or double pay.

sentence of court-martial. Major Dandimont told him that he had shown himself unfit to exercise authority, which was quite true. But the unhappy Scot felt the loss of his stripes as a keen disgrace, while his ruined hopes of becoming shortly a full bombardier, with double pay, caused him almost to sob. I could not help feeling sorry for him, though I had seen enough of the service to convince me that inefficient "non-coms" like himself are a pest in the army.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN HOSPITAL.

I RETURNED to hospital after O'Rourke's court-martial, for my arm was much inflamed and very painful. I now had to take off my uniform and don the hospital dress, which consisted of light blue linen trousers and coat, a white shirt, slippers, and a cotton nightcap. There were only two other surgical cases in the hospital besides mine, so that my two fellow-sufferers—one of whom was Forringer—and I had a six-bedded room to ourselves.

There were several of these rooms, each having its separate category of patients, and they were one and all perfect. If the hospital at Sheerness be a fair sample of other military hospitals, they must be pronounced a credit to the country. Our room was large, well aired, and cheerful. It had a high ceiling, and two lofty windows with panes kept brilliantly clean. The walls were white-washed, but had a drab dado. The beds were of iron, painted light blue. A bright fire always burned in the grate, for there was no stint of coals.

The staff of the hospital consisted of a surgeon, always called the doctor; a hospital sergeant, his assistant, who attended to the pharmacy; two soldiers of the Army Hospital Corps, who acted as attendants and dressers; and a couple of gunners, who were the servants. The diet of

patients was of three kinds. Those who were convalescent or under surgical treatment, and not confined to their beds, had their ordinary dinners brought them from barracks ; but they were supplied with tea or coffee and bread and butter morning and evening. The patients on half rations had light food—veal, chicken, custards, and sometimes wine ; the patients in a very low state were given almost anything that could tempt their appetites. Of course the sturdy patients, who had little the matter with them, and who often resorted to malingering to remain longer in hospital, were all for getting dainties ; and the hospital sergeant had to exercise some watchfulness to prevent them from begging the port wine and milk of patients who were too ill to care what they ate or whether they ate at all. He was an intelligent man, this sergeant, and gentle of speech, though firm.

On my second day in hospital, Sergeant-Major Harden came to see me, and brought me a fine piece of news. In his blunt way he told me that he had recommended me for promotion, and that I should have charge of my barrack-room, if I got cured quickly. "You've been two months in barracks," said he, "and ye're well on in gun drill. Ye're a steady chap, too, with a proper notion of keeping yourself straight, and I know I can trust yer to stand no nonsense in your rome, like that stupid McLankey did. Besides, you won't be wanting anybody to do yer writing for yer as he did."

My heart was thumping for joy as he spoke, and for a few seconds I could not find words in which to thank him for my unexpected rise. But all of a sudden I thought of poor Forringer, and the idea of being put in command of a room over his head gave me a twinge of pain for his sake. Knowing Harden to have the best of hearts, I ventured to tell him all I felt on the subject. Forringer was not in the room at the time, so I could speak freely about his character and the injustice he had undergone.

"Why the doose do he hold 'is 'ead down like that?" asked the sergeant-major, angrily. "One 'ud think he'd been a forger or picked pockets. As he's been an officer he ought to know how to be'ave 'isself better. What use 'ud he be to me as a bombardier if he didn't dare look 'is men in the face?"

"I think he would dare if he saw any hope of getting on in the service; but, you see, it's a heavy fall for a man who's been an officer of Hussars, to become a gunner and remain one."

"It's all his own fault for not knowing how to play the gentleman better," retorted the sergeant-major. "The idea of a great hulking chap like him moping all his life because he hit a Methodist parson over the nose with a 'assock! Why, I've done ten times worse in my time, and ain't a bit ashamed of it." The old soldier here struck his breast and warmed at the recollections of his valiant deeds. "Why, if I'd broke my 'eart over all I did when I was a young un, I should be in my grave by this time, instead of which I've got a missus and six children. If a man wants to be a soldier, I say, let him cock his chin up, switch his stick about a bit, and give a crack over the 'ead to anybody who comes foolin' round 'im, else he might just as well be a Methodist parson 'isself, instead of shying 'assocks at 'em."

"For all that I hope you'll put in a good word for Forringer," I answered, laughing as if I enjoyed Harden's fun. "You'll do him a kinder turn than you think. I'm half afraid that he'll go to the bad if nothing is done for him."

"I ain't paid for keeping men from going to the dorgs as like that sort o' company," rejoined Harden in a surly tone. "It ain't easy to do anything for Forringer with the officers. The mere sight of 'im is enough to make 'em stick up their noses like virtuous females when they see a

pretty girl with a babby. In a few days I shall be sending some men over the water,* and I'll see what can be done then. But mind yer, if Forringer do get his stripe, it'll be owing to that crack on the head O'Rourke gave him with a bit of coal. As for you, Dickson, get cured sharp, and come out o' hospital."

He went away after this, but I knew that a word in season always had its effect with him; and the very next day, to my inexpressible gratification, I heard that Harden had recommended Forringer for promotion, and that Major Dandimont had consented to give him a trial. I had kept the news of my own promotion secret, so as not to mortify Forringer; but now, in informing him of his own luck, I told him of mine, and we capered in high glee. I never saw a man so much elated over so small a piece of preferment as this once brilliant officer of Hussars. He said he felt as if he had got his foot on the first rung of the ladder that would lead him to a commission again, and he confessed that ever since he had enlisted it had been his ambition to become an officer once more. "I didn't think," added the poor fellow, "that I should have so much misrepresentation and animus to put up with."

"But you must try and alter your manner," I answered; and I communicated to him as much of the sergeant-major's utterances as I could do without hurting his feelings. "You ought not to look so ashamed of yourself."

"But I do feel ashamed of myself," replied Forringer, mournfully. "It was a horribly blackguard thing, to go into a chapel and create a disturbance, being tipsy. Though I didn't fling the hassock, I was with the fellows who did it, and that was just as bad."

"Didn't any of them stand by you in your trouble?"

"Oh yes; they came at first and wanted to stand in the

* To the Isle of Grain, or to Tilbury Fort.

police docks, but I told them that it was better that one man should be punished than half a dozen. Then they shook hands with me, called me a brick, and vowed they would be my friends till death. But when I had been cashiered they one by one dropped me ; and not long ago, when I met one of them in London—I was in uniform at the time—he turned his head away and pretended not to know me, though I gave him a salute.”

“He was a cad, and so were the others. But that’s an additional reason why you shouldn’t let yourself be trampled upon any more. How old are you now ?”

“Not quite twenty-five. It was two years and a half ago that I was cashiered, and I fancied when I enlisted that it would only take me a couple of years to get a commission. I was a fool, though, to enlist in the Artillery ; I did so thinking that I was less likely to be thrown amongst officers I had known. But promotion is slower here than in other branches.”

“Well, I dare say you can get a commission before you’re thirty, if you set your heart on it. Have you a certificate ?”

“Only a second-class one,” replied Forringer, with a laugh. “I had been crammed for my army examination by an expensive coach, who charged a hundred guineas a quarter ; but I forgot everything I had learned as soon as the need for retaining it was gone, and when I came here it was all I could do to get a second class. However, now I see some little hope before me, I’ve a good mind to do like you, and read with Rivett for a first.”

The elation which Forringer and I both felt seemed to do our wounds more good than the doctor’s stuff ; and, for my part, I should have been glad to go to my new duties at once. But I could not return to barracks with my arm in a sling, and the doctor would not hear of my taking off the

sling for several days. As the weather was very fine, my confinement was irksome, but I did the best I could to make time pass. Newspapers were brought us from the recreation-rooms on the day after issue, and we had novels from the circulating library. When not reading or chatting with Forringer, I used to go and pay visits to patients in the other rooms.

There were several cases of ague in the hospital, for Sheerness is situated in the unhealthiest part of Kent ; there were also two consumptive patients, one of whom was Edward Grimall, or the "moper," whom I had not seen since the day when the doctor had rejected him as unfit for service.

I was shocked to see the alteration which had come over the unhappy man in these two months. He was now wasted to a shadow, his skin white as porcelain and transparently clear, his eyes large and glittering in their deep hollows. Consumptive patients are said generally to cherish delusions about their state, and to form rosy hopes about the future ; but the "moper" had no anticipations of a cure, and his only hopes were about his funeral. The authorities, aware that he was dying, had not applied for his discharge, so that he was to all intents a soldier, and would be buried as one. He talked with extraordinary animation about the military band that would play him to his earthly resting-place, and the Union Jack that would cover his coffin, just as if these were honours that he had won by his merits. Indeed, he had won them by craft, and he appeared to derive a morbid satisfaction from the thought that the crowning act of his dishonest life had been to get into an honourable profession by fraud.

"I wouldn't live if I could," he said, when I had been conversing with him a little time. "I never thought to die in such a good place as this. My life was botched ; it could have done me no good."

"Why shouldn't you mend, like others, if you think you want mending?" I said, adding the proviso from a reflection that it ill beseemed me to cant.

"Some men can't mend," answered the "moper." "If I were to live I should be in Portland or at Dartmoor soon. There were too many flats about the world for me. A man finds it hard to work honestly when he can earn his ten pounds a day by putting his fingers into fools' pockets."

"Couldn't the fear of imprisonment keep you straight?"

"I was never in prison," answered the dying man, a little scornfully. "I knew I must be caught in time; it always is a question of time in those trades. But so long as I kept my health I lived like a gentleman, though it was a beastly life."

"You admit it was not a happy life, then?"

"It's a life like no other," replied the "moper," after a short hacking cough. "Before you lead it you must make up your mind not to care a snap for any creature on earth but yourself. When you want money, you go on the prowl and get it where you can. I once made six hundred pounds in one day, and that kept me honest for three months; but when your pockets are full, drink and women soon empty them for you, and you have to begin again. You never feel safe; you're too restless to live in any place long, and you're always downhearted except when you've been drinking."

I had several more conversations with the "moper," and the stories he told me about his adventures in London almost made my hair stand. Railway stations, racecourses, churches, and places of amusement had been his hunting grounds, and he had never gone out to steal, he said, without bringing off spoil. But for the fact that he never went foraging until he was reduced to his last sovereign, he might have committed many more successful robberies than he did. Edward Grimall did not tell me his real name, but he

said he had disclosed it to the chaplain, and given the latter some money to buy a gravestone for him when he was gone, and to have the words "Gunner, of the Royal Artillery," carved upon it with his name. That the money to be so expended came from the proceeds of felonies did not appear to disturb the "moper's" mind in the least.

The chaplain used to visit the hospital every day, and one afternoon he came whilst I was sitting by the "moper's" bedside. He was a cheerful old gentleman, of pleasant ways, who never sought to worm more out of soldiers than they chose to tell him. Experience had taught him that he would only forfeit their confidence by doing so. Conscientious but not earnest in his ministry, his first object was to show the men with whom he talked that he had not come to lecture them; and he discussed with them whatever subjects they liked to start. He always made a point, however, of indirectly inculcating upon soldiers respect for the uniform they wore, and had a large fund of entertaining stories about soldiers who had got on well in life by courage or steadiness. To recruits hopeful as young bears, these narratives were especially interesting.

Edward Grimall received the chaplain with great respect, and of his own will turned the conversation upon the religious subject of preparation for death. Nothing could be more comforting than what the chaplain told him about man's grounds for belief in an after life, or more satisfactory than the way in which the "moper" listened to him. I was so much struck by Grimall's edifying manner, that I blamed myself severely for having allowed him to talk to me at such length about his dishonest pranks, and I resolved that I would do so no more. Whether he was sincere in his repentance I know not; he, at all events, made no canting pretences at piety. My attempts to lead his mind towards pleasant themes, however, met with no success, for when I

spoke about my own boyish days, hoping to awaken happy recollections of his, he cut me short by saying, "I was a nasty little sneak and liar at school. I don't remember a time in my life when there was a spark of good in me."

On the day before I left hospital Grimall had an awful coughing fit that nearly carried him off, and when I went to see him in the afternoon he could hardly speak. He sat up, propped by several pillows, with a look of pain and weariness in his face, but quite composed; and he asked me, in a feeble voice, whether I would read him a chapter from a book that lay on his bed. It was Creasy's "Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World." I began reading the account of the battle of Waterloo, and the "moper" listened with attention and evident pleasure. But in the midst of my reading the door softly opened, and George Tudor came in. "I was told I should find you here," he said, with his sunny smile, and stole on tiptoe towards the bed.

The "moper" had turned his head, and as he glanced at Tudor a sudden flush overspread his countenance. "Hullo! *you* in the army?" he exclaimed, with more of astonishment than welcome in his tone.

"You appear to know me," said Tudor, frowning slightly. "I don't remember you."

"Come, that's good," rejoined the "moper," with a short bitter laugh. "I suppose you've forgotten Kate Raffles in the Haymarket, and the twenty-pound note which—— But never mind, I see you recollect now."

The hand which Tudor had laid on my shoulder trembled, and looking up at his face, I saw it livid. "Good God! Gerard, is that you?" he faltered. He was too much overcome during a minute to articulate; then he said, "I had no idea you were here. But, I say, you won't tell tales out of school?"

"No fear," answered the other faintly, for the few words he had spoken had exhausted him.

After this Tudor went out as softly as he had come, without adding a syllable, and merely nodding to me.

"You and Tudor are old friends, then?" I said to the "moper."

"He calls himself Tudor, does he?" replied the other.

"Well, I won't be a tale-bearer, but when I'm gone you may tell him from me that I wouldn't change places with him."

Half an hour later, when I left the room, I found Tudor had been waiting for me all the time in the passage. He was standing by a window, with a preoccupied air, drumming upon the panes. The first question he put was, "Did that fellow tell you anything about me?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I used to know something about him once," rejoined Tudor, scanning me nervously, as if uncertain whether to believe me. "All I need tell you is that he was not a respectable character, and you mustn't put much faith in what he says."

Considering what I knew of the "moper's" past life, I thought it not improbable that he might once have picked Tudor's pocket. "He has told me a good deal about himself, but nothing about others," I repeated.

"Well, I shouldn't have cared if he *had* spoken about me," answered Tudor, breathing more freely as he saw that my opinion of him was unaltered. "I only thought it right to warn you. Is Gerard, or whatever he calls himself, really dying?"

"Yes, he can't last out a week."

"Poor beggar! Well, it's perhaps lucky for him. I've just seen another consumptive patient downstairs, and he's dying too, yet they keep a guard with him because he's a prisoner. What fooleries there are in the service!" and upon this Tudor went away laughing.

This other consumptive patient whom Tudor had seen was being made the victim of one of those pieces of official routine which are sometimes funny, sometimes heartless, but often so absurd in their application. He was a young man who had deserted from the Artillery, and when retaken he was in the final stage of consumption. He was put into the hospital, and there were circumstances in his case which, had he been brought to trial, would have ensured his acquittal. But he was too ill to be tried, so he was considered a prisoner; and, being a prisoner, he had to be guarded. It was not enough that he should be confined in a room which had barred windows and heavy bolts to the door; it was not enough that he had only hospital clothes within reach, so that, even had he escaped, he must have been stopped by the sentry at the gate, or arrested by any policeman who saw him in the town. All day and all night he had an armed gunner to watch him. Every two hours a non-commissioned officer came round to relieve guard, and showing the patient to the sentry, said, "This is the prisoner." Turning restlessly in his bed at night, the wretched deserter saw at all hours a soldier in full uniform sitting in the room. There was a soldier guarding him an hour after he had breathed his last!

CHAPTER XIV.

LIVELY PICKET DUTY.

WHEN I left the hospital I found the tenants of our barrack-room quite changed. The room had been taken charge of during my absence by a corporal who had come from Woolwich with a party of trained recruits. One of these men had got my cot; another Forringer's; two more occupied the cots of McRonagh and O'Rourke, who were both in cells. Yuffin, not liking to remain in a room under my command, had managed to get exchanged into another, and McLankey was also gone. In fact, there was a complete break up of our original party.

I was not sorry for it, as it is always somewhat trying to exercise authority over a roomful of soldiers who have lately been one's equals. I had a much better chance of being cheerfully obeyed by new men who had never known me otherwise than their superior. The only difficulty was that we had now not a single old soldier in our room—that is, not one of more than a few months' standing—and I had to consider myself fortunate that Bob Wilde had served in at least one other regiment before honouring the Artillery with his presence. His experience was often of great use, and he was delighted to assist me in every possible way to maintain order and cleanliness in the room. No one had rejoiced in my promotion so heartily as he.

My privileges as acting bombardier were to wear a gold stripe on the arm, and a gold arrow-head point downwards on the cap ; I was exempt from fatigues ; and I was allowed to have a locked chest under my cot, in which to keep my belongings. This was a great boon, for it is very inconvenient to have to keep all one's light possessions higgledy-piggledy in a long india-rubber bag, so that if you want to get your shaving tackle, for instance, you must burrow a yard deep for it amongst a lot of other things. On the other hand, the responsibilities of a bombardier are quite equal to his privileges. He ranks as a non-commissioned officer, and is accountable for everything that goes amiss in his barrack-room ; but, while preserving order, he must contrive to live on good terms with his men, and not worry them by his conceit or vexations into mutinous conduct.

It happened that I had got my promotion at a very busy time. Sheerness being a *depôt*, there was a continual going and coming of troops there, and December is the month when these chops and changes are most frequent. To begin with, furloughs of six weeks had been granted to all men, having served a full year, who applied for them ; and an intimation had been issued that, as there would be a large draft for India in January, men who wished to take leave of their families had better avail themselves of this opportunity. The names of men going to India are always kept secret till a couple of days before their departure, lest the prospect of seven or eight years' foreign service should induce them to desert.

Filling up the gaps caused by men on furlough came a number of time-expired men and others, who had just returned from India, and who had been sent to the *depôt*, either to await their discharges, or to be posted afresh to some garrisons in the kingdom. Then new batches of trained recruits (*i.e.* men who had passed their drills) arrived

from Woolwich ; and as the enticement of Christmas jollities in barracks allures a great many men out of work into the army in the last month of the year, raw recruits kept pouring in from London at the rate of from twelve to twenty a day. The barracks were saved from overcrowding, however, by the taking of drafts for the Isle of Grain and Tilbury, and by a big haul which was made of the best-looking and smartest recruits in dépôt for the Horse Artillery.

One afternoon, at a general parade, half a dozen officers appeared, having among them a sharp-looking officer of Horse Artillery. We were all deployed in two lines, and this gentleman, sauntering down the ranks, picked off all the men of particularly smart appearance and neat figure. He took no notice of the stout, the weak, the lanky, the short, the ugly. I had the honour to be among those he selected. Sergeant-Major Burlow walked behind him, jotting down the names of the men chosen, and presently we were told that all of us who had been designated were going to Woolwich, "to be put into jackets." * As a non-commissioned officer, however, I had the right to decline the favour, and I did so, for two reasons : firstly, because, being only an acting bombardier, I should have lost my new-won stripe in exchanging ; and, secondly, because the stable-work in the Horse Artillery was far heavier than I cared to undertake. If I went into the Horse or into a field battery, I hoped it might only be when I had become a full bombardier or corporal at dépôt, in which case I should keep my stripes on exchanging and find my stable duties much lightened.

Immediately after the foregoing parade, all the residuum were marshalled, and Sergeant-Major Burlow made a pick

* The jacket of the Horse Artilleryman is profusely braided ; so the exchange into the Horse Artillery from depot or field-battery is called, in the case of officers as well as men, "getting the jacket."

among this less comely lot for Grain and Tilbury. There were expostulations and gnashings of teeth as he chose his victims; but he cried out sternly, "Silence in the ranks!" and continued to pick, partly according to his own fancy, partly by reference to lists which had been furnished him by the battery sergeant-majors of men whom they did *not* wish to part with. Burlow chose no man on these lists of favourites. So far as I could see, the sergeant-majors had reserved all the smart, orderly men who gave no trouble, and had left to Burlow's mercies all the riffraff.

McLankey, Yuffin, and Boyle owed it to their recent scrape that they were picked off; but, to my inexpressible chagrin, Bob Wilde was chosen too. As soon as the parade was dismissed I ran to find Sergeant-Major Harden, and pleaded earnestly with him that Bob might be allowed to stay with me; but he was inexorable. "That chap's a deserter," he said, sharply. "He hasn't given trouble yet, but he's likely to do so at any moment. I don't want any of his sort in my battery. As for you, it's time you learned to do without 'im. If you want a man to brush your things for you, I'll give you one of those fellows who've just returned from India—a steady old soldier whom you could trust with your eyes shut."

I cannot decide how far the sergeant-major was justified in his treatment of Bob Wilde. It is a good rule in the service to encourage brothers serving together, and though Bob was not my brother, he had taken a liking to me and I had enough ascendancy over him to keep him straight. He had not once been checked or punished since our enlistment. When, however, I returned to him reporting the sergeant-major's determination that he should go to Grain, the slumbering nature of the Whitechapel rough woke up in him, and he emitted a torrent of the violent blasphemies from a mouth foaming with passion. He

looked as villainous as when I had first seen him at St. George's Barracks in his rags. Turning away from me, he caught up his jacket violently from his cot, clapped his cap on the back of his head, and skating out of the room with a wild double-shuffle and shout of "*Horroo !*" called upon all who pleased to come out and drink with him. "I'll teach the blooming mokes to come with their blooming tricks over me!" he yelled; and, contemptuous of the fact that it was near school-time, he set his face to go out of barracks. On his way he met O'Rourke, who had been released from cells that morning and had the appearance of a caitiff with his close-cropped ginger hair. O'Rourke was likewise bound for the Isle of Grain. The two made up their differences as comrades in misfortune will, and set off into the town together for a drinking bout.

The objection of men to go to the Isle of Grain was that there was nothing to do there. It is a bleak island with a few farm buildings and a small barracks. Communications with Sheerness are kept up by means of a boat manned by four gunners and a bombardier coxswain dressed as sailors, which goes and returns several times a day with letters, orders, and provisions; but no soldier may come from the island without a pass. Tilbury Fort is little better. The men look upon both places as prisons, and their only resource there is to spend all their time and money in the canteen. Female attractions are at so high a premium in the island, that a couple of farm wenches there had each a score of non-commissioned officers and gunners dangling after them.

Bob Wilde's escapade having become known, some other rowdy spirits followed his example of shirking school, and so in the evening the pickets were doubled. I was sent in command of one of them. I had been on picket duty before as a gunner, and most ludicrous work I thought it.

A dozen men in their greatcoats, marching at a slow, funeral step in Indian file, patrol the streets of the town from six o'clock till "tattoo" at nine, their business being to arrest any soldiers whom they find misbehaving themselves, or any defaulters who may have broken out of barracks. When a picket has been out an hour and a half it returns and another takes its place. The pickets being doubled on this night, there were forty-eight men and four non-commissioned officers, all cursing Bob Wilde by their gods.

I had charge of one of the two pickets that went out at half-past seven in a murky drizzle of rain. Remembering Talleyrand's maxim about zeal, I was not disposed to be too lynx-eyed in the performance of my duties ; and though I had a list of men (Bob chief among them) who were to be arrested wherever I might meet them, I had made up my mind not to apprehend anybody who did not actually thrust himself in my way. But this is just what Paddy O'Rourke did. When we were halfway down the Blue Town, he tumbled out of a public-house right in front of us. Bob Wilde was close behind him, but started back. I pretended not to notice Bob ; but I collared O'Rourke, who instantly began to scream, blaspheme, and show fight.

The aversion—for it is little else—in which the British soldier is held by a respectable section of the public comes undoubtedly from the infamous conduct of some men who wear the Queen's uniform ; and I must say that, so far as my experience goes, of all the degraded, ruffianly soldiers who disgrace the service, the wild Irish are the worst. The Scotch are generally very good soldiers ; among the English soldiers those who are blackguards are usually amenable to reason ; but the Irish, when bad, are amenable to nothing. There is little good in them when sober, for even then they have a hand in every scrape ; and when they have taken a

drop of drink they are like raging beasts. The fact that they fight well in war cannot be taken as a set off against the mischief they do in the service ; for, after all, they fight no better than the English and Scotch. And they brag ten times more.

O'Rourke was not so drunk as to be unaware that resistance against thirteen men was hopeless, but he wanted a shindy in the streets with a crowd of civilians looking on. He struck out with his fists, and savagely kicked at his comrades, who were only doing their duty, and who, he knew, were forbidden to retaliate. Any one of them would have been his match in a fair fight, and had two been let loose upon him, with orders to pay blow for blow if he fought, he would have whined for "pithy" and been docile as a lamb, for he was a puny coward at best. But now, amongst a dozen men who durst not strike him, he was in his element, and he lashed out with such desperate blows, that he may have appeared to the spectators as a man of amazing valour fighting single handed against thirteen men. It was with the utmost difficulty that we could overpower him, and several got bloody noses in the attempt—I among them. At last, when he was hemmed in, he flung himself down flat in a puddle, and rolled over and over in the road till he was soaked in slush, shrieking and swearing as he did so like a maniac—all this so as to force us to carry him back to barracks. Even then his struggles were so violent that he had to be carried in the "drunkard's posture," face downwards, four men holding his legs, and four his arms. A jeering crowd followed us, who evidently thought that he was a hero, of whom, by superior numbers, we had taken a base advantage. But when we had got inside the barrack gates and laid our unsavoury load upon the floor of the guard-room, O'Rourke changed his tactics. The dastard remembered that he would be taken to the prison guard-

room on the other side of the barracks, far beyond the parade-ground, and if he became obstreperous on his way thither, with no civilian sympathizers looking on, he might fare badly. So he lay motionless as a stone, pretending to be unconscious, and in this condition of sham lifelessness was borne by eight men to the end of his journey. Next morning, when a soldier whose eye he had blackened expostulated with him for his cowardice, the mean-spirited brute whined, "Be Jabers, man, oi'm sorree, but oi was dhrunk."

When we had mopped our faces after consigning O'Rourke to the main guard, we had to set out again to recommence our picket, and presently Yuffin fell into our hands. He was drunker than the Irishman, and might without any more risk than the latter have shown himself quite as combative; but he evinced his English spirit by acquiescing at least physically in his capture, though he relieved his mind by vapouring out a blast of foul language, and condemning the eyes of us all, individually and collectively, to perdition.

Nine o'clock came, the bugle sounded tattoo, and for the third time I returned to barracks with my picket. But I had to remain on duty, for Bob Wilde and some other men had not turned up. As they had no leave they ought to have been in by nine, and so we were sent out again to look for them. I now had to enter every public-house on my beat, and ask if there were any soldiers there. The landlords did not dare to harbour defaulting soldiers under pain of getting into trouble on licensing day, so one or two jerked their thumbs over their shoulders to intimate that we should find our quarry in the tap-room. Thus half a dozen stray sheep were recovered; but we could not find Bob Wilde. Twenty-six men in two divisions scoured all the streets and back alleys of the town till eleven, but without unearthing him. Where Bob spent that night and all the next day and

the following night, I cannot say, but when he returned to barracks it was voluntarily, after an absence of forty hours.

He had reckoned that if he remained away until the draft for the Isle of Grain had started, his place would be filled up with another man ; and this actually occurred, for in the army a missing man must be replaced by another somehow. But Bob did not escape a regimental court-martial, which sentenced him to fourteen days in cells. He would have got twenty-eight days but for this being his first offence.

O'Rourke, having been caught in time for the draft, was duly sent to Grain, but commenced his sojourn in that place of delight under a sentence of fourteen days' confinement to barracks. The severity of this punishment does not consist so much in the prohibition from leaving barracks as in the concomitant penalties. The defaulter has three extra drills of an hour each in heavy marching order, the first being at six in the morning ; when not on drills or fatigues, he has to answer to his name every half-hour throughout the day ; and he is forbidden at any time to enter the canteen. At all hours there is a bombardier on guard at the canteen door, to see that defaulters do not enter, and he must seem to such toppers as O'Rourke was like a demon guarding the gates of Paradise.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW MATRIMONIAL PREDICAMENT.

"Dickson, there's a lady downstairs wishes to see you."

Visits of ladies are not frequent in barracks, but I thought it might be only Corporal Pincott's wife, who was washer-woman to our room, and who had probably come to explain how a pair of socks had been mislaid last week. So I ran down accoutred just as I was, with a towel wrapped round my head, a sheet girt round my loins, and a whitewashing brush in hand. We had all been engaged in giving our room its quarterly coating of whitewash in view of Christmas, and we had to cover ourselves in the way just described so as to prevent the liquid lime from falling on to our faces or clothes and burning them. What was my surprise on running downstairs to find that my visitor was pretty Mrs. Winkley the tobacconist, looking prettier than ever, and very nicely dressed too.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, colouring with astonishment, and with a little laugh that was not very flattering to my appearance. "So you've turned painter now?"

"Not quite," I answered, smiling rather sheepishly as I shook hands with her. "But what good wind brings you here, Mrs. Winkley?"

"I've come on purpose to see you," she answered in a more amiable tone, "and I've brought you some cigars and things. Can't you come out to take a walk with me?"

"What a pity you didn't let me know you were coming!" I said, as I removed my towel and sheet. "I could have got leave for the day. Passes are not signed after nine o'clock, and, without leave, I'm not free till five."

"That's all very well," muttered Mrs. Winkley, reddening slightly again and lowering her glance. "One does these things on the impulse of the moment. I wasn't sure yesterday that I should make up my mind about coming to-day."

There was a complimentary avowal of a disturbed state of heart, but it did not help me out of my difficulty. I had not only to consider how I should get leave, but where I could bestow Mrs. Winkley until I had obtained it, for I did not wish to give her a poor idea of military gallantry by leaving her standing in a passage. It occurred to me that George Tudor was just the man to do the agreeable towards my visitor by showing her over the recreation-rooms and barrack grounds whilst I hunted up our sergeant-major.

"Come, come," said Mrs. Winkley in a mocking way, as she saw me pensive; "they don't treat you soldiers so like babies as not to allow you to come out for a walk with a lady? Are you waiting for somebody to tie on your pinafore, or are you afraid your nurse will give you a whipping if you go out without her?"

We made merry over the idea of my nurse coming after me with a rod; and I remained talking with Mrs. Winkley for a few minutes in my shirt-sleeves, whilst a gunner, whom I had called, went in quest of Tudor. That fascinating corporal soon arrived, neat as a new pin, and his handsome face evidently produced a favourable impression. He, on his side, was enchanted at the mission that was going to be entrusted to him, and proceeded at once to "show off," blowing away with an authoritative breath, as it were, all the difficulties that stood in my way: "Oh dear me, you can easily get leave. I'll manage it for you. Just tell the

sergeant-major that I've asked you to come and help me in the library. He'll let you go for the rest of the day."

This, in military parlance, was mere "gas," but it served to make Tudor shine as an obliging and ready-witted fellow in Laura Winkley's eyes. The two sallied out together on the best terms, whilst I, with assistance, lifted the presents which my fair *inamorata* had brought me (they were so heavy that a porter had carried them from the station), and bore them up to my room.

I found them to consist of a box of prime Havannah cigars, a box of five hundred Russian cigarettes, a meer-schaum Turk's-head pipe, and a pound of Turkish tobacco. Then there was a hamper neatly packed, with a couple of roast fowls, a tongue, two large pots of jam, six bottles of port, and one of brandy. The sight of these—to me very embarrassing—gifts made the mouth of my men water as I unpacked them, and a cordial murmur ran round when I decreed that they should provide a feast for that evening at tea-time. However, I reserved the bottle of brandy, one of the pots of jam, and a dozen cigars as a propitiatory offering for Sergeant-Major Harden.

He was always in the sergeants' mess-room about this time; so I went to call him thence, and he accepted my presents without much hesitation, for he was a family man, to whom gifts of this description, proffered by safe hands, never came amiss. The big jam-pot for his "young uns" touched him, while the cigars, which he sniffed like a connoisseur, gave a voluptuous curl to his nostrils. "Aha! your young 'ooman has come to see yer, eh? I just caught sight of her as she scuttled through the gates, and was almost salutin' her for the *h*adjutant's wife. I'm dashed, if I'd 'ad a young 'ooman like she at your age, if I'd 'ave taken the shilling. You can't go out with her, though, till the *h*officer has been round at dinner-time. After that, just

clap on your pouch-belt as if you were on duty, and if any officer asks you in the town what ye're about, say I sent yer out to the brewer's for the sergeants' mess. And, I say, if yer've got a hamper upstairs, you must clear it out before the officer comes, or he'll be axing questions."

This, of course, had to be done, and I was even doubtful whether the officer would not be interrogative if he espied the roast chickens and tongue on the cook's shelf. But we managed to hide them behind a number of bowls, and I secreted the wines along with my cigars and tobacco in my locked chest. As soon as the officer had gone his rounds (he was the barking captain, who used to bounce in and out like a cricket ball), I slung on my pouch-belt, drew on my white gloves, and ran out to enjoy my half-holiday. I was glad to wear my pouch-belt, for the broad band of pipe-clayed leather crossing the jacket from the right shoulder and suspending the cartridge-pouch behind, with its ornament of a little cannon in polished brass, sets off the uniform very happily. I was not without some trepidation, however, about the offer of marriage, which I supposed it was the purpose of Mrs. Winkley's unexpected visit to renew.

I found this unconventional lady and George Tudor sauntering along the ramparts where the big guns were, ready for any Van Tromp who might try to sail up the Thames. Tudor had been doing the perfect cavalier, showing Mrs. Winkley all that was worth seeing in the barracks, and leaving her a high opinion of his cheerfulness and courtesy. He surrendered his charge with a look of well-feigned regret when I arrived, but had the tact to decline an invitation to dinner, which was not pressed. He inquired, however, at what time Mrs. Winkley was going back to London, and promised to be at the station to wish her good-bye.

"What a nice young man that is!" remarked the fair Laura, as she and I walked out of barracks together.

"Yes, he is," I answered, laughing. "I expect he has been making love to you? He is very clever that way."

"Some are too quick at that game, to make up for others who are too slow at it," retorted Laura, a little sharply. "You're not much of a man at love-making, are you, Harry Dickson?"

"It depends. I could make love to you by the hour, Laura."

"Five minutes would be enough, if you were serious, Harry," replied she, gravely. "I know I've done what a respectable young woman shouldn't do in coming down to see you to-day, but I wanted to tell you that I must get married soon."

"Has Prugmann proposed to you, then?" I asked, trying to parry her seriousness, jesting.

"Lor'! to think I should listen to a low foreigner like that!" she answered. "I've had plenty of offers from respectable men, Harry Dickson. There's a Mr. Stevens who travels in the cigar line, and has a thousand pounds of his own, and he'd take me to church next month, if I allowed him to put up the banns. But I won't, because of the words I spoke to you when you were in London. Do you recollect?"

"Yes, I should be very heartless if I didn't, but——" I felt I ought for decency's sake to evince some jealousy of Mr. Stevens, but for the life of me I could not do so. "What makes it so necessary that you should marry, Laura?" I asked.

"Because, as I told you in town, a young woman can't keep a tobacco shop and her character at the same time," she said. "My business is altogether with men, and mostly young men. The greater number of those who come to my shop think they've a right to insult me. If I bear it kindly,

they're encouraged to try again ; if I get downright angry, I lose my customers. What am I to do ?”

There was so much sense in her manner of saying this that I felt no more inclined to joke. She continued mildly, but with growing animation, “And it isn't so easy for a young woman to find a husband that could make her happy. I don't want to marry a fool, nor a man who would bully me. When I saw you I thought there was kindness in your eyes, and that I could manage you—for you want managing a little, Harry—which doesn't mean that I should be an unruly wife either, for I don't hold with women who'd tie up their husbands and make them ashamed of themselves.”

“Well, but, Laura, just consider my position,” I said gently. “Ought I to marry when I have no money of my own, and no knowledge of business that could be useful to you in your trade?”

“That's as you feel inclined,” she answered almost inaudibly, and there was a moment's silence. But she was not the woman to throw herself at any man's head, and endeavoured to convey this in the words she spoke next : “By rights a woman oughtn't to tell a man of her fancy for him—that I know ; and I shouldn't have spoken to you if I'd thought you knew your own mind, Harry, which I'm not sure that you do. This morning I said to myself that I should be a silly woman if I let my pride stand in the way of you and me coming together, if you had a mind to it. That's why I travelled down here.”

“And brought me all those cigars and other nice things,” I said, trying once more to assume a lively tone ; for her voice was quavering, and I was in dread she would cry.

“You gave me this locket,” she answered, touching the trinket round her neck, “so I had the right to give you something.” Here her voice broke altogether, and she faltered, “Oh, Harry, it isn't that friend of yours, Mr.

Tudor, who would have behaved so silly as you are doing."

"George Tudor ! Oh, Laura, believe me, I hope you will get a better husband than either him or me," I rejoined fervently.

"It's all very well hoping and wishing," she said, and turned her head away.

We had strolled beyond the Blue Town and got into the country. Mrs. Winkley stopped by a roadside gate, rested her arm on it, and began to cry, not in sobs but quietly, and striving to dry the tears that flowed fast from her eyes.

A man always feels uncomfortable who has made a woman cry, and I felt so. I took stock of my actions during the past three months, and pondered as to whether I was not a very foolish young jackass, who had put myself in a false and ridiculous position by my selfishness and folly. Here was I, having spent nearly ten weeks in the service, without having once written home to tell my parents where I was and what I was doing. What object in life was I definitely proposing to myself? Did I want to take to soldiering in earnest? Hardly ; for I was beginning to feel uneasy at the idea that I might be included in next month's Indian draft, and be spirited away from England for a great number of years. Did I contemplate returning home as soon as I had got tired of the army? If so, why was I acting so heartlessly in not writing a line to allay the anxieties which my friends must be feeling on my account? On the other hand, did I wish to cut myself adrift from family ties, and take the first chance that offered of settling honourably in the world? If so, why did I not avail myself of this opportunity I had of getting into a profitable business and marrying a good wife—for that Laura Winkley was a good little woman I fully believed then, and am persuaded of now.

My self-upbraiding thoughts vexed me, till Laura had dried her eyes. She turned round at length, and I could read in her expression that she was anxious to part company from me as soon as possible. If Tudor had been in my place he would have kissed her, flattered her, given her a promise of marriage, while forging some excuse for delaying the ceremony, and he would have sent her away happy. He one day told me that his rakish experience had taught him never to inflict upon a woman such a slight as would humiliate her in her own estimation. "If you make fine promises and don't keep 'em," said this moralist, "the woman can throw the blame on you, hate you, despise you, and feel eager to tear your eyes out; but if she tries to wheedle you into a promise and fails, then she hates and despises herself, while hating and despising you doubly; so you're no gainer."

I cannot say whether Laura hated and despised me; but I had mortified her, and gawkishly betrayed my consciousness of the fact. Unfortunately Laura's train back to London did not start till three o'clock, and as it was only one then, I proposed dinner. She consented, by way of killing time; and I took her to the Post Captain, which was the only respectable house where a soldier in uniform could have got entertainment with a lady. Rose Kurney, who knew me well by this time, and played none of her conceited tricks with me, received Mrs. Winkley civilly, and accommodated us in the best parlour. We got a good dinner of joint and pudding, but it was a miserable meal we made after all. I was glad when I could go out and pay the bill, and when the time came for our setting out for the station. We reached the station half an hour too soon, but Tudor was already there.

It might have been only fancy (as I thought then, but I know better now), that made me suppose that Laura and

Tudor talked somewhat confidentially on the platform, and squeezed each other's hands rather warmly when they parted. Laura had almost recovered her spirits by the time I handed her into a second-class carriage. "Good-bye, Harry," she said composedly. "Come to see me when you are in London. I shall keep your money and luggage till you want them. Write to me, if I can be of any use to you."

When the train had started, I walked out of the station downcast, and Tudor's praises of Laura did not help to put me in a better mood. "She's a charming little woman—a regular stunner," he said, "and good as gold. By-the-by, what was that she said to you about money? Does she give you coin whenever you want it?"

"Not at all," I answered, wishing to clear up any misapprehension on that point at once. "I left thirty pounds in her hands, in case I should wish to buy my discharge."

"Oh! that's what I call hanging on to the service by a thread only. Well, you're quite right; a man may find it convenient to cut and run sometimes. What, does she keep your clothes too?"

"Yes, I left a lot of luggage at her house," I replied unguardedly.

"You're a man of precaution, I see, and after what you've just said, I don't suppose you intend wearing this livery long. Heigho! as soon as I can get Miss Truelove to elope with me, I shall slip my own cable. The sooner the better."

"Are you seriously contemplating an elopement, Tudor?" I asked.

"Ain't I? But hush, it's a secret," he answered, laying a forefinger laughing upon his lips. "I'll tell you when the pear is ripe. Meanwhile I've promised that pretty Mrs. Winkley to try and get her the custom of the

sergeants' mess for the cigars. Let me see, I must note down the address. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right," I said as he wrote; and somehow I felt pleased to think that his confidential talk with her might only have been about cigars.

That evening, at six, there was a grand feast in my room with the chickens, tongue, jam, and port wine which Laura had brought down. I added a gallon of beer to make the flow of soul more complete, and this seasonable liberality was highly appreciated by all, but by none more than by some Indian service men who had just joined my room. Mindful of his promise to give me a servant who should take Bob Wilde's place, Sergeant-Major Harden had sent me four of these veterans, withdrawing as many recruits. They spun curious soldierly yarns at table, and their enlivening talk, mingled with an amount of drink to which I was unaccustomed, made me hilarious, and after that a little maudlin. So at about eight I betook myself to the newspaper-room, and there wrote Laura a silly letter, in which I expressed the hope that I had not offended her, and begged her to believe that I would always remain her true friend and so forth.

She kept me waiting three days for an answer, and when it came it was couched in a few friendly but cold lines, stating that she was unaware of any reason for quarrelling with me. I chanced that day, however, to be barrack orderly, and all the letters of the men in dépôt passed through my hands for distribution. Among them was one in Laura's hand, addressed to "Corporal Geo. Tudor, Esq."

I was guileless enough to imagine that the pair were corresponding about tobacco.

CHAPTER XVI.

BILL SHORT, THE OLD SOLDIER.

I HAVE just stated that four "Indians" had been put into my room. They were all bronzed, medalled men, who had served more than twenty years, and had only got a few months more to do before getting their discharges with pensions. The brownest of the lot, who had succeeded to Bob Wilde's cot, and who looked after my things, was a man named William Assaye Short; and he deserves a special description.

He had been born in India, the son of a married soldier who had served under Sir Arthur Wellesley at the battle which was commemorated in his boy's second name. Bill Short had been brought up in barracks, and trained to a soldier's life from the day when he put on his first pair of trousers; for he became a bugler at the age of ten, and thus reckoned eight years' service before he regularly enlisted. He did not come to England till he was twenty; and, after that, he went from station to station all over the world. He had been to Canada, Jamaica, Gibraltar, Malta, the Cape; he had served through the Crimean War, all through the Indian Mutiny, the Chinese War, and the Abyssinian campaign, and after the fall of Magdala had returned for four years to Bengal. He had five service medals, a good conduct medal, and one for saving life; also

four good conduct stripes ; but he had never risen above the rank of gunner, because he had obstinately refused promotion. He belonged to a generation who used to see promotion won slowly, and were accustomed to connect it with tiresome responsibilities. Bill Short hated "badgering," and, according to his idea, the life of a non-commissioned officer was spent entirely in badgering others, or being himself badgered. Add to this that Bill Short could but just read and write, and was utterly incapable of keeping accounts, except those which concerned his own expenditure and were docketed in his own head. He never took up a pen, save when he signed his pay-book monthly before an officer ; and he never touched a newspaper, though he liked to have items of news read to him whilst he smoked his short pipe filled with cake cavendish.

Bill Short's face, one cheek of which bore a deep sabre scar, was like brown leather slightly varnished ; he was of medium stature, powerfully strong, but all bone and muscle ; and his shoulders were so square set that his back formed a hollow as though his knapsack had imbedded its perpetual mark there. His language when angry was awful—a mixture of English and Oriental oaths too startling to be repeated ; but in general he was good-humoured, though his tone was surly, and seemed to imply a chronic disbelief of everything that was said to him. Like men of crass ignorance, he suspected everybody of trying to impose upon his credulity ; and his manner of receiving the simplest statement, whether he actually doubted it or not, was by growling, "Get along yer-r-r ; d—n yer-r, don't gammon me."

In all that did not regard military matters Short's mind was an absolute blank ; and he had in his conduct the thrifty, prudent habits that distinguish alike old soldiers and old women. His solitary thoughts were about saving his

money, cleaning and mending his things. He kept his kit in a state of tidiness that seemed to mock all emulation from the smartest soldier of more youthful years; and he was as deft at darning and piecing as though he had served a long needle-apprenticeship under his honoured mother. Sometimes you would see him seated on his cot, and overhauling a pair of trousers or a jacket with an air of profound cogitation. He was reflecting whether the time had come for having these trousers turned, or whether he could make his third-best jacket do for three months longer by cutting new arms for it out of the back of an old tunic superannuated. Short's object was never to get in debt one penny to the tailor's shop, and he solved this problem, always so difficult to careless soldiers, with the utmost ease, and without ever being seen with a discoloured stripe or facing. He was, in fact, considerably in advance upon the regulation allowance of clothes, and had more new jackets and trousers on his shelf than a younger soldier would have been allowed to show.* But to veterans like Short officers were always kind and forbearing.

Short was a man of substance, for, thanks to his good conduct medal and stripes, he drew about four shillings a day clear pay, and for the last ten years of his career he had been saving. He had frequently been an officer's servant, and had made money in that capacity, though no niggard where his enjoyments were concerned. One of his former masters had in dying bequeathed him a hundred pounds. Altogether Short had thirty pounds invested in the Savings Bank, and about three hundred pounds which

* Soldiers are not suffered, as a rule, to overload their shelves, as this would destroy the symmetry of barrack-room arrangements. So if they keep well within their allowance of clothes, they generally sell superfluous jackets and tunics. Old soldiers, like old women, have a mania for accumulating clothes.

an eminent London solicitor, brother of another of his former masters, had "put into a hole" for him, as he called it—that is, invested on mortgage. When I learned these things, and saw what manner of a man Short was, I scrupled at giving him so little as eighteenpence a week for blacking my boots and furbishing my accoutrements; but this was the sum usually paid for such services, and he was quite content with it. It was a mere trifle for him to do my things in addition to his own; besides, I had been recommended to him by the sergeant-major as "a gentleman," and I was bombardier of the room, so that it gave him pleasure to serve me. At least so he declared, and insincerity was not one of his faults.

Bill Short's three comrades were men like himself, more or less medalled, sun-burnt, and grumpy, but all as alike as brothers in the characteristics which go to make up the veteran soldier. There was a cool pride about them which came from their having lived so long among subject races, by whom the commonest English private is cringed to as a master; and this sentiment was increased now by the consideration which younger soldiers, and even officers, paid to them. Discipline sat as comfortably upon them as the saddle upon an old charger; they knew every rule of it, and obeyed orders to the letter—not, indeed, without grumbling; but then grumbling was a mere trick with them, and they would have growled even in Paradise. Their *esprit de corps* was such that they despised every regiment in the service except their own, and affected to have the poorest opinion of that under its modern management. The calm respect which they showed to officers, and which, gradated in clearly marked shades, they extended to all non-commissioned officers, including bombardiers, was mechanical, for they were always scoffing at officers whose standing in the army was not equal to their own. They

appeared to think that the only efficient superiors they had ever seen were the officers and sergeants (most of them long ago dead) under whom they had served as recruits, though the stories they told with such grim relish about the savage harshness and drunken, brutal excesses of some of these worthies were enough to make the flesh of a young soldier of our times creep all down his back.

I used often to draw out Bill Short about his experiences; but the process was not easy, for an old soldier or sailor does not retail the best of his yarns to the "griffins" of his own profession. If you want to get a good story of flood or field, well told, you must be a civilian and the unquestionable superior of the veteran who relates it, so that he may be induced to talk civilly, and to abstain from gross exaggerations from fear of your not believing him. An old soldier spinning a yarn to a young one is always too anxious to confound and humiliate his hearer, and he tells prodigious lies for the purpose.

I used to compliment Short on the way he had polished my boots, making them gleam like mirrors.

"Get along yer-r-r!" he would say. "By Gosh, there isn't a d—d man comes on to parade here who knows what a well-blacked pair of boots is, or a well-brushed jacket either. Curse their eyes, if they'd served in India in the old days when 'Bloody' Jadson was our colonel, he'd have had half a dozen of 'em off parade every morning and lashed to the triangles to teach 'em how to keep clean."

"There seems to have been a good deal of flogging in the old days?"

"Gosh! I've seen half the men in a battery march out in the afternoon with raw backs, and the sun hot enough to fry you, so that their shirts stuck to their skins like pitch-plasters. Jadson wasn't the man to let a gunner lie stinkin' in the infirmary because he'd flogged him. I've known him

give a man fifty lashes in the morning for being drunk, and another fifty next day because the chap wouldn't put his knapsack on, saying his back hurt him. What d'yer say to that?"

"Why, that Jadson was an infernal brute."

"Brute? D—n yer-r-r, there wasn't a finer officer in the service. Gosh! you've not been three months enlisted, and you're already a bum'deer. In those times, maybe, you'd have got a few stripes on yer back before 'aving one on yer arm. Soldierin' was something like then; it's all d—d coddling and tea-slops now."

There was obviously a good deal of affectation in this pessimism, for these old soldiers must have been quite conscious of the great improvements which had been introduced of late years into the condition of men serving in the army. Indeed, a trait common to them all was their appreciation of creature comforts, and their wondrous keenness in taking care of themselves. If you came into the room of an evening, you were pretty sure to find them all four ensconced in the snuggest seats near the fire; at dinner they got the best platefuls of meat; when the beer was distributed, not a man among them ever obtained a drop less than his share. Accustomed to the cheapness of provisions in India, and to the high feeding soldiers indulge in there, they of course found perpetual fault with the barrack fare at home; but they ate it heartily for all that, and when one of them was cook, he mostly contrived to get a prime cut off the meat in the kitchen, and to eat it in there before bringing the dish up.

On taking charge of the room, I had introduced the rule that the cook should be changed daily, every man taking his turn at this work, so as to do away with the abuses which had sprung up when Yuffin had usurped the cook's office as a quasi-permanency. I was not so strict as

to object to a man passing his turn occasionally, if he found some one else agreeable to his doing so ; but I did not want to see any one cook many days together. The old soldiers quite approved of this rule, which, they said, was the usual one in garrison ; and, for their own parts, they made excellent cooks, being always punctual, carving well and quickly, and keeping the room in the trimmest condition. They were also very faithful in conforming to a regulation about which young cooks are too lax. The cook, being the general servant of the barrack-room for the time being, is responsible for everything that may be stolen out of it during his term of duty. He has a key of the room, and may lock the door, if he pleases, while the men are out on drills ; but the proper rule is that he should not go out of sight of the room unless there be a soldier in it. Now, the veterans guarded the room vigilantly ; but the younger cooks were always running up and down stairs on some idle errand, and the consequence was that several petty thefts took place in our room.

The reader may remember Farkin, who joined on the same day as I, and was the victim of a robbery on his first night at Sheerness. Though he bragged of his high connections, he was but a City clerk, who had committed embezzlement, and had enlisted so as to get "underground" till the hue and cry was over. He was morally a poor creature, sneaky and mendacious, who had probably been badly brought up, and had gone wrong from never having had a strong hand over him. Nothing was known to us of Farkin's antecedents, but the old soldiers, laying their heads together, began, without very clear cause, to suspect that he was the thief. The things filched had been the merest trifles—scraps of bread, butter and cheese, a cake of soap, a chin-strap ; but a petty thief in the barrack-room is, like a mouse in the larder, a thorough pest : besides which, to a

soldier, nothing that has to be bought with money is a trifle.

It was resolved to watch Farkin, and the time chosen for doing so was one day when a raw recruit was cook. Bill Short, in going out to morning drill, left a jacket on his cot, and in the pocket three marked shillings. In the course of the day those shillings were abstracted. Farkin, not knowing that he was being spied upon, went to the canteen and called for a pot of beer, tendering a shilling in payment. But the "Indians" had taken it in turn to follow him wherever he might go when off duty, and one of these men, winking at the canteener, asked to look at the shilling that had just been paid. It proved to be one of those that were marked.

Here was the theft clearly brought home to Farkin; and the old soldier taxed him with it on the spot, calling him an accursed thief, a jail-bird, and other fine names. Farkin turned horribly pale, denied, protested that the whole thing was a mistake; but, so saying, slunk out of the canteen, and beckoned to his accuser to follow him, that no one might overhear what they said. When they were outside, Farkin at first swore that he had found the marked shilling on the floor; but presently, when they reached the barrack-room, he was made to turn out his pockets, and the other two shillings being discovered upon him, he had to make avowals, wringing his hands and imploring Bill Short to "give him a chance." The four veterans discharged at his head all the oaths in their vocabulary, and Short ordered him to refund the stolen money, declaring he would "put in a crime" against him, and get him six months at Millbank. At last, however, the swearing and threatening subsided; no charge was made against the thief, and Farkin doubtless congratulated himself on having got off pretty cheaply.

But it was not meant that he should escape punishment.

Old soldiers object to get a messmate sent to the treadmill, thereby ruining his military career for ever, for a small theft ; but they have a stern, sharp justice of their own to check thieving. It was decided that Farkin should be "cobbed ;" that is, privately flogged. To carry out this punishment it was necessary that I should not be present, as I should have been obliged to check anything in the nature of an assault ; and so two or three days passed before a convenient opportunity was found. But one evening when I was absent, Farkin, being on guard next day, came in to prepare his arms, and took off his jacket. Suddenly, as he was crossing the room to fetch something, a counterpane was thrown over his head from behind ; and before he could extricate himself, he was seized and flung across the table. He was then prepared for execution in the schoolboy fashion, and on his bare, wriggling person received two dozen cuts with a riding-whip, laid on with all Bill Short's might. A soldier kept the door during the punishment, so that nobody could come in, and Farkin's screams of agony were smothered in the counterpane which tightly imprisoned his head. When the last cut had been bestowed, the culprit was left to disentangle himself as he could ; and by the time he could see clear, the four old soldiers were quietly seated by the fire. Not a word had been spoken during the execution, and Farkin would have been unable to swear who had assaulted him. There were three soldiers in the room besides the veterans, and they had all lent a hand in this cobbing.

Farkin, of course, knew better than to make any complaint about what had been done, though he sobbed half through the night, and hobbled about for two or three days in grievous terror lest he should get another dose. But I am happy to say that his severe whipping cured him more effectually of theft than possibly any term of imprisonment would have done. There had been just enough publicity

about his offence and punishment to make him a marked man in dépôt for a few days ; but as he had not been legally sentenced, no indelible stigma was put upon his name, and as new soldiers were constantly coming and going, his affair was soon forgotten. But Farkin did not forget it, and he never stole so much as a bread-crumbs again. His was the thin-skinned nature which pain justly inflicted effectively corrects, and from that time he did very well in the service. When last I heard of him he was in India, a sergeant, and married ; and doubtless he had learned to bless the day when Bill Short's rough, but merciful, treatment of him gave him the "chance" he wanted of becoming a new man.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRISON CELLS, AND SCHOOL.

NOTWITHSTANDING that I had a new servant, I did not forget hapless Bob Wilde, and took an early opportunity of paying him a visit in his prison.

Beyond the further side of the parade-ground at Sheerness are the officers' quarters, the married men's quarters, and the schools for soldiers' girls; beyond these, again, the school used for boys and soldiers, which forms part of the old barracks and overlooks a largish drill-ground, where stand, to the right, the head canteen and the regimental office, and, facing the school, the main-guard house.

This house is fronted by a colonnade, beneath which soldiers confined in the guard-room, awaiting trial, may take an hour's exercise every day. But there are two guard-rooms—the room which the French call *corps de garde*, where soldiers on guard for the day lounge or sleep in the intervals of mounting as sentries; and the prison guard-room, which in France is called *salle de police*. There ought to be distinctive names for the two things in English.

The prison guard-room is a large chamber, poorly lighted, and having half its space occupied by a camp-bed made of inclined boards, with a slightly raised step at the head to serve as bolster. Here are brought not only prisoners awaiting trial, but all soldiers who return late to

barracks in the evening, without having a satisfactory reason to give to the sergeant at the gate guard-house. The soldiers consigned by night to this place of delight are mostly drunk, and one may imagine how pleasant their company is to the captives who are sober and want to sleep. About twenty men can lie down on the camp-bed. If they remain in the guard-room more than a night, they are allowed to have their cloak and a blanket, but no bedding.

Bob Wilde, however, was undergoing his punishment in the cells, to which access was obtained through a door in the centre of the colonnade. It was pretty easy to get permission to view these cells through the sergeant who happened to be on guard at the time ; but I went to work in a still better way, by calling upon old Nodge, the provost sergeant, who lived under the school, and inviting him to empty a pot of beer at the canteen. Old Nodge never declined an honest offer, and he was not backward in showing his small prison, of which he was proud—"for," said he, "there ain't a better-kept gaol in England than this little place of mine."

Old Nodge was at once the turnkey, hair-cutter, and caterer of the men in his custody. When a prisoner came to him, he first clipped his hair into bristles, then locked him up, then drew his eightpence a day and fed him upon slender rations of bread and gruel. Some affirmed that old Nodge gave the captives but four pennyworth of food a day, and pocketed the other fourpence, so that every prisoner brought him a direct profit. This may or may not have been the case. At any rate, prisoners sent to old Nodge were always welcome, and the more he had the better pleased was he.

"Here now's a cell the Queen of England might sleep in," said the sergeant, conducting me into a flagged passage and unlocking the first door. It was an ordinary prison cell, with a truckle bed, and brightly whitewashed. Outside,

ranged all down the passage on two parallel rails, were a row of cannon balls shining with black varnish. These were for the "shot drill" of prisoners sentenced to hard labour; but as it gave old Nodge trouble to drill his men, he preferred employing them, so far as he could, on other work.

"I've but three prisoners in here now," said he, apologetically, as he unlocked another door, "and this is one of 'em—the gentleman as slept two nights running out of barracks."

I entered a kind of cellar and saw poor Bob Wilde seated on a stone, and having another stone before him, on which he was breaking smaller stones with a mallet. He was pale and hungry from confinement and low diet; but his face lighted up at sight of me, and he thrust his tongue into his cheek to intimate that he should like a quid. I had no tobacco with me, but I innocently asked old Nodge whether I might give Bob a shilling.

"Gie 'im a shilling?" exclaimed old Nodge, indignantly. "He shan't have a d—d 'apenny. He ain't acted square wi' me, he haven't. Do you know what I did for 'im when he came here? I put 'im in this garden to work."

Saying this excitedly, old Nodge threw open a door in the cellar, and ascending three steps, exhibited a patch of ground planted with potatoes and cabbage, where prisoner No. 2 was weeding. As the produce of this holding belonged to old Nodge, it was manifestly his interest to turn as much unpaid labour into it as possible, so he employed well-conducted prisoners to do his gardening.

"Now, I don't care what a man 'as been doin' before he comes here," cried Nodge, nodding to the second prisoner, and speaking aloud as though for his benefit as much as Bob Wilde's; "if he'll act like a man to'rrds me whilst he's in cells, I'll act like a man to 'im. But this here Wilde, I'd

no sooner set him in the garden than he tries to climb over that wall. If I hadn't come just in the nick of time he'd 'ave done it, and a pretty mess I should have got into with the officers for allowin' a pris'n'er to escape. 'Twarn't like a man, and he don't deserve a shillin'. He shan't 'ave nothin'." By the time Nodge had thus delivered himself, however, I had, behind his back, jerked Bob half a crown, which was expeditiously pocketed.

"I say though, sergeant, you'll, at all events, let me send out for a pot of beer," said Bob, winking to me, as old Nodge returned into the cellar.

"Hark to that now ; he wants a pot of beer !" ejaculated old Nodge, staring at me with almost piteous astonishment. "Why don't you ask for a bottle of champagne while you are about it?"

"Champagne will do as nicely, if you've any by you," responded Bob. "But I say, sergeant, just let me send a message to my young 'ooman and ask her to come and keep company with me here."

"I'll tell you what, my man," answered old Nodge, shaking his head and tapping his inseparable stick on the ground, "I'll say to you what the parson said to the church-bell when it called him away from his dinner, 'Your tongue wags a d—d sight too fast.' Just try to keep 'appy on water and gruel, for you'll get nothing else here."

Hereupon we marched out of the cellar, and old Nodge sternly double-locked its door. As he was doing this I glanced through the peephole of a cell in the passage, and beheld prisoner No. 3 squatting in the snip posture and tailoring. He was an assistant in the tailor's shop, who, like Bob, had got into trouble for breaking his leave, and his hard labour in the cells consisted in turning a pair of old Nodge's trousers.

"My plan is to make 'em work, but keep 'em to useful

work," said the provost-sergeant complacently. "These are niceish sort of cells, you see, but the fault is there ain't enough of 'em. When Indian drafts are heavy they're all full, and I have sometimes to put two and three in a cell, which ain't neat, as things ought to be in a good prison."

"I have heard a good deal about these Indian drafts," I said. "Is there really so much disorder when they take place?"

"Lor', yes; you'd think a parcel of devils had broke loose in the place," replied old Nodge. "You see, there's lots of recruits only enlist to lie by quiet for a time, waiting for summut to turn up; and when they learn they're to be shipped off to Injie at two days' notice, it drives 'em nigh mad. All the men are confined to barracks; but it don't matter, lots of 'em always break out. All my men of the military police has to guard the station; pickets are out all day and night, and the town police help us into the bargain. As you're a bum'deer you'll find your hands pretty full o' work then. But I suppose, by the way, you'll be one of the Indian men yourself?"

"What makes you say that?" I asked, alarmed. "Have you heard that my name is down on the draft?"

"No; but you're a likely sort o' chap to be chosen. I say, though, you don't seem to relish the idea? Perhaps you'll be one of them as'll come to my cells."

"I hope not, I'm sure," I replied, with a wry smile; but Old Nodge laughed heartily, as I beat my retreat after thanking him for his civility.

The truth is, I was not at all pleased at the idea of being sent to India, and as the time for the draft was now scarcely a month distant, it was beginning to be a matter for my serious consideration how I should avoid going, or act if I found that going to India was unavoidable. I had no means of ascertaining whether I should for certain be

selected, as the drafts are not actually formed till orders come from London stating the number of men required. After this a call is made for volunteers, and the quantity of men needful to complete the draft is then made up by the doctor's more or less discriminating selection of full-grown soldiers having strong constitutions. Once a soldier is drafted he cannot apply for his discharge. He may apply for it when he reaches India, but his application will not be entertained so readily there as in England; a year or two may elapse before the discharge is granted, and it will then cost him in one way or another about a hundred pounds, for he will have to pay for his passage home out of his own pocket.

There are two ways of shirking foreign service, at least for a time—the one is by malingering or shamming sick; the other is by getting a “berth” of some sort which takes one off regimental duty. The first method was, of course, repugnant to me; as for the second, I was aware that my sergeant-major, Harden, strongly objected to “berths” for young soldiers, and he had warned me against them in promoting me. “Now, don’t you get skulking as a clerk in any of them offices,” he had said. “If you want to get on in the service, stick to your drills and learn soldierin’ till every /officer knows you for a smart man. I know you gets extra pay in the ‘berths,’ and there’s a precious deal too much favouritism in promoting clerks out of their turn, though some of ’em couldn’t tell a cartridge from the bung of a beer barrel. But, after all, when it comes to the pinch of choosing sergeants and sergeant-majors, mark this, that the /officers always pick a man who knows his regimental duty. There ain’t many men amongst us sergeants who are scholars like you—’cause why? Becos most of the scholars think they’ll take short cuts to promotion by getting into the /office. Well, they often find they’ve done like the

Irishman who took his short cut across a bog : they get into the hoffice and stick there ; they become corporals and nothing more, till sometimes they flounder out and come back to their duty, finding that many newer chaps than they, who could hardly read and write when they joined, have stole a march on 'em. So just you mind my advice, Dickson, and stick to soldierin'."

All this that Sergeant-Major Harden said was quite true, and it was evident that a well-behaved and well-educated soldier's chances of promotion were greatly increased by the eagerness with which "berths" were sought after by soldiers who disliked the hard work of drills. If you examined the list of "effectives" at the dépôt, you had to take off an enormous discount for men who did no regimental duty, and never paraded in the ranks, except on Sundays for church-going, and at the monthly "musters" when portions of the Articles of War were read out to us. Setting aside the men who were employed in the different shops (and they were numerous)—the wheelwright's, armourer's, tailor's, carpenter's, and shoemaker's—one had to reckon about twenty men who were officers' servants and wore plain clothes ; six (highly educated) who were assistant teachers in the school ; eight or ten who were clerks in the regimental office ; two who were hospital servants ; three assistants in the canteen ; six military policemen ; five who manned the Isle of Grain boat, and half a dozen more who were clerks to the pay-sergeants, quartermaster, and quartermaster-sergeant. Then there were some special berths like those which Slooper held on the cricket-ground, and Tudor in the recreation-rooms ; there was the cook and two assistants, a couple of hair-cutters, and one or two more whose idle businesses I forget.

It would have been no abuse if all these men, taken from the effective strength of the batteries, had been old

soldiers well seasoned, who would have been available as first-rate effectives at any moment ; but although there was a rule about men not being taken off duty until they had passed their drills, it was very loosely interpreted. Before an artilleryman can be described as effective, he must have learned infantry marching-drill, with carbine shooting, cavalry sabre drill, and gun drill ; he must have served in a field battery with horses, and have gone through his courses of gunnery instruction, firing off field-pieces and siege-pieces at targets, and so forth. All this requires three years ; and one would not overstep the mark by saying that six years are required to convert a man into a thoroughly practised gunner. But most of the men in the schools and office had never got beyond their marching drills. I had not been a month at depôt before old Slocock, the schoolmaster, hinted to me that there would be vacancies in his teaching staff at the new year, and that he would then give me a berth if I pleased.

I now bore this promise reluctantly in mind, as a thing I might have recourse to in case of need ; but it did go against the grain with me to offend my sergeant-major by playing the "skulker," after his well-meant advice. My hesitation arose from my not being certain as to what my own intentions were with respect to remaining in the service. I rather liked hanging on to the army by a thread, as Tudor put it—a thread I could sever at any moment ; but it was becoming apparent that this state of things could not long continue. I should have to decide soon whether I meant to persevere in the army or leave it.

At school-time on the day when I had visited Bob Wilde in cells, my teacher, Rivett, informed me that the examination for second-class certificates would take place in a couple of days, and that I might then forward my application to be examined for a first class. Our papers would be

sent to Woolwich, and if I got my second class, an order would be sent that a couple of officers should examine me for a first class. All the men in Rivett's class were going to try for second classes, but only Forringer and I intended to risk the higher examination. Forringer was now working hard at conic sections and history, and had determined to volunteer for Indian service, so as to get promotion by the straightest road.

Rivett told me that two of the school teachers would also volunteer for India, so that I might certainly have one of the vacancies. "Do you mean to take it?" he asked.

"What is your advice?" I answered.

"All depends on what your ideas are," said Rivett. "You will have to go to India at some time, and if you mean to stay in the army, the sooner you go there the better. Your first-class certificate will be sent after you, and if you stick to your drills and don't drink, you are sure to rise. Then in India you get better paid, clothed, and fed than at home; your quarters are pleasanter, and you're looked up to as somebody by the natives. Many men are afraid of taking the long journey, but all those who have been to India agree that there isn't a place like it for soldiering."

"Why don't you go there yourself, then?"

"My case is different," he said. "I mean to stick to the school, so as to get old Slocock's place when he retires, which will be in about four years. I shall be a sergeant then, and have done ten years' service, so I dare say they'll give me the post. As I've no money, I have not the ambition to become an officer again. I shall be much better off as schoolmaster, with a rising salary of about eighty pounds, good quarters free downstairs, gas for nothing, and rations of bread, meat, and coal. Only, you see, there's but one schoolmaster in dépôt, and I shouldn't care to remain

in the school as assistant, with only ten shillings a month extra pay. The work is too hard, and the position," he added, laughing, "not particularly dignified."

I glanced round the schoolroom, and could not but concur in the opinion that Mr. Slocock's military assistants cut rather melancholy figures. Their jackets were dowdy from never being inspected on parade, their buttons did not shine, and their hair was too long. The occupation of these cultured young men during six hours a day was to teach little boys, the sons of soldiers; and a seventh hour, except Saturdays, when there was a half-holiday, they devoted to instructing uncertificated soldiers, among whom were some dunces, so obtuse that all labour bestowed on their numskulls seemed wasted.

Imagine the large schoolroom filled with about a hundred soldiers, divided into six classes. Here were the forms for beginners who could neither read nor write—fearful dolts some of them, who bleated through their spelling most ruefully; further on, some recruits were tracing pot-hooks and hangers with clumsy fingers. Then came a class which contained several middle-aged corporals who had got third-class certificates, but were trying to qualify for sergeantships by getting second classes, in conformity with a rule promulgated since Sergeant-Major Harden and most of his fellows had got their stripes. Some of these unfortunates, who were splendid soldiers, fairly sweated over the difficulties of compound interest and rule of three. The big drops stood on their foreheads, and there was a dazed frown between their eyes, as they tried to comprehend the patient demonstrations of their teacher expounding to them that $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{6}{12}$ meant the same thing. Those of them who were married men, and looked to promotion for securing an increase of pay, with better quarters and more comforts for their wives and children, were heroic in their plodding

application, too often, alas ! to be ill rewarded on examination day. There was one grizzled corporal in this lot who could not be made to reduce his money fractions to less than a farthing. When he was told to put down $\frac{1}{18}$ of a penny, he used to shout angrily, " But I tell yer there ain't no coin of that vallier. There's nothing below a farthin'. Don't come 'oaxin' me ! "

Old red-nosed Mr. Slocock, wearing a cap with a greasy red band, took a class of men who were tolerably well advanced ; but all the soldiers of really superior education were consigned to Corporal Rivett. This ex-naval officer was said to be a bad, irascible teacher of little boys, but he was a first-rate tutor to men like Forringer and me, who were desirous of learning hard things. His attainments were of no mean order, and he must have risen to a distinguished place in the navy, but for the untoward affair which got him cashiered. " You are safe for your first class," he said to me, at the conclusion of our lesson. " I am not so sure of Forringer, but he'll do if he doesn't fall back during the next three weeks. I'm giving him two hours every evening."

A couple of days after this, all the men to be examined were paraded for school instead of for the usual morning drills. In the schoolroom was an officer reading a novel, who was to superintend the examination ; but all the work was done by Mr. Slocock. We were made to write a dictation from an order of the day full of military terms, and one mistake in spelling was to be allowed for this paper. Then another order was read, and we had to write a *précis* of it. After this, we were examined in arithmetic as far as decimal fractions. The hardest thing set was a complicated military savings bank account, which involved computation of compound interest for small sums ; but the examination seemed ridiculously easy to me, though I can well under-


stand that it should have struck some of those poor middle-aged corporals as a much stiffer thing than extricating a field-piece stuck in the mud with a broken wheel, or establishing a battery under a heavy cross fire from the enemy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHAPTER ON ABUSE-HUNTING AND CHRISTMAS
PREPARATIONS.

CHRISTMAS was now but three days off, and all the men were active in making preparations for the adornment of their barrack-rooms. The favourite ornamentation consisted in masses of greenery ; long bands of calico, with words of good cheer, formed by pasting on large letters, cut out of coloured paper ; and in paper chains suspended from the gaselier to all parts of the room. These chains were made with rings, about the size of bracelets, of pink, yellow, and blue paper, and their effect, when sparingly used, was not bad ; but the taste of soldiers runs towards barbaric profusion, and when the chains were so multiplied that they darkened the rooms, their effect was tawdry and grotesque.

Having some knowledge of writing in Gothic letters and illuminating, I ventured to suggest that we might make the decoration of our room more striking if we cut a few large shields out of cardboard, and emblazoned them with suitable inscriptions. Over the fireplace we should have one illustrated with the three field-pieces which are the crests of the Artillery, and the two mottoes of our regiment, "Ubique" and "Quo fas et gloria ducunt." On the other shields we would put the names of famous Artillery commanders, glad-some wishes, and so forth. Greenery should be twined



round the gaseliers, the windows, and shelves; and we would have a Union Jack and a royal standard to support the principal shield, but the flimsy paper chains should be dispensed with.

Bill Short and the other veterans were quite willing that I should work my wicked will upon the cardboard shields, but they would not hear of doing without the paper chains. One would have thought a long-cherished privilege of theirs had been attacked. A Christmas room without chains would be as nothing in their sight. Bill Short said that the place would look like a pigstye without such adjuncts.

The military mind is conservative. I had before this timidly tried my hand at a few innovations, but had been compelled to forego them in deference to the obstinate prejudices of the veterans; and I was beginning to understand how statesmen liberally inclined are often turned from the path of necessary reforms by the fear of flustering sturdy old Whigs. I might, to be sure, have said—

“Hoc volo—sic jubeo—sit pro ratione voluntas!”

but would it have been seemly to ride roughshod over old fellows, some of whom had fired their first cartridges before I was born? Yet one innovation I had proposed seemed to me most desirable, for it concerned the comfort in which we took our tea, the meal which of all others in England best conjures up the idea of comfort.

The kitchen used to be closed at two, and as there was no getting hot water after that hour, the cooks made the tea for their respective barrack-rooms at half-past one, though the men were not expected to drink it till six. The pail in which the tea was brewed stood by the fire all the afternoon, with a counterpane over it to keep the steam from evaporating; and the result was that by six o'clock it afforded nothing better than a lukewarm, insipid drink. I

made inquiries and ascertained that for a charge which would not exceed eighteen pence a week, and which, if borne by the twenty-four barrack-rooms in common, would not amount to a penny for each, we could have boiling water served to us at five o'clock from the kitchen. The cook expressed his willingness to contract with us on those terms.

But no sooner had I broached my plan than the veterans recorded their energetic protest. They were accustomed to drop in for their tea at any time they pleased between two and six, and didn't see why I should interfere with this arrangement. The tea was quite good enough for them as it was, they said, and they weren't going to pay a farthing to make it any better. The truth is these old hands used to secure each their bowl of tea when it was in prime condition at a quarter to two, and they would get another bowlful at six, as there was always a good deal left, owing to many men not caring to drink tepid slops. However, the veterans raised such a hulla-balloo, that scarcely a man in my own room or in other rooms stood by me, and all I gained was to be talked of for a few days as "the bum'deer who wanted to stop the men's tea."

Another reform attempted in connection with beer was even more fiercely scouted. Government allowed to every man a penny a day beer money. It was called beer money, but it was properly canteen money, which could be taken out in any article sold at the canteen. When spent wholly in beer, the accumulated allowances of the mess furnished a pint four or five times a week for each man; but as there was always a scramble for this beer, some men getting more than their share, others getting none, from being out of the room when it was poured out, it occurred to me that each man should be free to have his money spent according to his taste. Now, I knew that some men would

have preferred to have a pat of butter every morning for their canteen money ; others would have liked cheese, an occasional bloater for tea, tobacco, or stationery. But of course the old soldiers had an interest in getting as much beer brought up as possible, for they attended the distribution of this liquid as punctually as a parish clerk attends church service. Therefore once more they lifted up their voices against me. I had tried to "stop the men's tea," now I was trying to "stop their beer:" when would my encroachments end? Those men who should have supported me were shamed out of doing so, by the vehement expostulations of the other side, who contrived to make it appear as though everybody would be the loser by the proposed change.

It will not be wondered at, after this, that I should have had to wage a battle royal in order to check a scandalous waste of salt that used to occur every day in our room. At dinner time the cook used to set a block of salt on the table, and the men sliced off pieces of it with their knives. In this way a great deal was littered upon the table, and a quantity more was spoilt in big lumps on the sides of plates. When the cook cleared the table, he used to take up what was left of the block, but sweep up all the rest with the leavings which went into the pig's-wash tub, whence it often occurred to me that the pigs who ate the barrack refuse must have found their food highly seasoned. I calculated that nearly four pennyworth of salt was wasted every week in our room ; and thinking that the introduction of salt-cellars might possibly stop this, I purchased four wooden bowls and as many wooden spoons, which were always set on the dinner-table. I am bound to say that these receptacles for salt, placed within close reach of everybody, were found convenient by the younger men ; but out of sheer perversity the veterans abstained from using them for several days.

As, however, I forbade the cooks to put the salt blocks on the table, the old soldiers were obliged to choose between doing without salt or helping themselves to it out of my cellars; so they took the latter course, with ill grace enough at first.

When a man has barked his shins several times in kicking at an abuse, he begins to look at abuses with a wary eye. But these things, so perilous to tread on unawares, may be circumvented. I got round the beer question by the simple device of providing a pint measure, and standing by to see every man get his strict allowance, but not a drop more. At this the disgust of the veterans knew no bounds; but they durst not complain. When, however, their vested interest in other men's allowances was abolished, they became indifferent as to how these men spent their money; and soon butter for breakfast was the chief thing purchased with the canteen pence.

As for the tea, I seized an occasion offered by the complaint of two recruits who had on two evenings found the tea-pail empty at six o'clock, and I ordered the cook to serve no man with his tea before five. This rule affected none but the veterans, for they were the only men who had ever drunk tea immediately after dinner. They had to submit; but shortly afterwards one of them, being cook, served out the tea at five fragrant and boiling. He and his chums had subscribed between them to buy a kettle, which from that time sang merrily on the hob every evening. The veterans, however, made no allusion to this utensil. They ignored it as stolidly as if it was not theirs, or as if it were a witches' caldron invisible to the eye of the virtuous. There it stood and bubbled and sang, however; and it made tea which afforded a welcome refreshment after the fatigues of afternoon drills.

One other abuse I had to cope with, and this was

connected with the talking and story-telling that used to go on in bed after the lights had been put out. I had no desire to stop this, and indeed I enjoyed good stories as much as anybody; nor could I be squeamish as to the language in which they were told. But, making every allowance for the coarseness of uneducated men, I had to draw the line somewhere, and I drew it at yarns which were designedly filthy. Whenever a narrator lapsed into obscenity, I used to say, "Come, come, none of that," and this check was generally enough to recall the men to order. But one night Bill Short began a marvellous story about a Hindoo widow whom he had saved, as he alleged, from the Suttee rite, and as he provoked a good deal of laughter by some details which were really funny, he was encouraged to add more and more impure spice to his narrative, till at last I stopped him, addressing my remonstrance in a low voice as his cot was close to mine. Bill paused, but there was a general call for him to go on. Hereupon Bill cried, "Boots!" and an almost unanimous answer of "Spurs!" showed him that his audience were awake and eager to hear the rest of his tale.

"Well, you see," said Bill, "Bum'deer Dickson is took pious and don't like Injian stories."

"Your story began very well," I answered, "try and finish it in the same way."

"No, I shan't. When you cut a chap's d—d whistle for him you can't expect 'im to go on," replied Bill crossly.

"Very well, then, we'll say good night all round," I replied. "Good night, you fellows, and no more talking now."

Bill Short was very sulky with me for two whole days after this. He would not speak a word, and was no doubt awaiting that I should speak to him in order that he might give me a piece of his mind. But I let him sulk, for I had

done no more than my duty, and was minded to convince him that he was not going to be my master. With all proper deference (which I never failed to show) to his years, his brave services, and his superior military knowledge, he yet belonged to an old school of soldiers whose example was not in all things good for us younger men to follow. The soldiers of what he called his day choked in tight leather stocks, were robbed of their pay, huddled on board cranky troopships like cattle, were flogged for trifles, were thrashed by the rattans of sergeants, and became by dint of rough usage coarse brutes, brave no doubt like wolves in time of war, but much like wolves too in peace. The modern British army is in many points far from what it might be as a school of good manners and conduct ; but it is an improvement on the old, and every non-commissioned officer can, within the sphere of his authority, help to make it better and better, if he tries. At least, such was my opinion ; and obedience had become so much of a second nature with Bill Short that he respected me the more when he perceived that, somehow or other, I generally contrived to have my way when I was seriously bent upon it.

But to return to our Christmas decorations, which were being carried on with spirit. I toiled away at illuminating the cardboard shields ; others tied up holly and laurel ; and those who fancied paper chains were busy cutting out rings and pasting them. The veterans, as usual, took but a platonic interest in this work which they had declared to be so indispensable. They preferred to sit by, smoking their pipes and watching the younger hands labour. But they growled criticisms when the chains were not gaudy enough to their taste :—"Gie us more colour, d—n yer-r-r, there, yer-r young bloke with the scissors. Put in less o' that yaller stuff and more of the red. Gosh ! there ain't a colour to beat red."

As numbers of men leave barracks on Christmas Eve

for a three days' furlough special messes have to be formed for Christmas Day. About half the men were to be absent from my room, and two-thirds from Tudor's, so his men and mine joined ; but as Tudor was not going to dine in barracks, the dinner was to be held in my room, and I remained mess president. To fill our table I invited Forringer, who had not yet a room of his own, and Bob Wilde, who was to be released from cells on Christmas Eve.

The Christmas dinner is always an elaborate and succulent affair, consisting of roast beef, a goose, a turkey or game, plum-pudding, mince-pies ; dessert of oranges, apples, and walnuts ; and beer almost unlimited. The cost of these luxuries is defrayed partly from the canteen fund—that is, from the surplus profits of the canteen, which Government generously surrender to the soldiers' use—and partly by the officers, who often present a four-gallon cask of beer to each mess. Then the tradesmen of the town who purvey the regimental messes send in gifts—one the ingredients for a punch bowl ; another two or three bottles of wine ; a third oranges, and so on. Again, presents are sometimes sent by former officers, and by the gentry of the neighbourhood who have any connection with the army. In the year of which I am writing the Sheriff of Kent resided close to Sheerness, and as our good luck would have it he had been an Artillery officer ; so he took it into his benevolent head to send us a dozen prime Norfolk turkeys, and about a furlong of Cambridge sausages. Let his munificence be for ever remembered !

To eat the Christmas dinner in proper style, it was usual to hire tablecloths, dozens of plates, dishes, and wine-glasses. I betook myself to the Post Captain to see about procuring these things, and Rose Kurney, who for some reason was in the highest spirits, promised to send them all in, along with two bottles of rum and some lemons for our punch bowl.

But she would not accept a penny in payment. "No, no," she said, frisking away as I tendered my money. "All I'll ask you is to drink my health. You'll drink my health *and happiness*, won't you?"

"Certainly, Miss Kurney;" and in a lower voice I asked, "Shall I join George Tudor's to it?"

"Oh yes, do!" she answered, blushing brightly. "Drink both our healths, will you? I feel so happy, bum'deer, since this morning. Everything seems to be turning out well somehow. I shall never have spent such a happy Christmas before—never, never."

"I suppose you won't tell me why?"

"No, don't ask now," she replied, laughing, "though you may guess. It will no more be a secret in a few days' time."

I supposed that Tudor had been fooling the girl, for I could not imagine that he had so abruptly recanted his late opinions about the derogativeness of marrying a publican's daughter. Could it be possible, though, that old Kurney had forced him to declare his intentions towards the girl, and that the flirting corporal had found himself too hopelessly entangled for retreat?

Tudor had somewhat avoided me since the day when I had been witness of his confusion by the "moper's" bedside, but I fell in with him soon after leaving Rose, and he was instant in inviting me to dine with him at the Post Captain on Christmas Day. He was a little flushed, but his animation was joyous.

"I wish you'd come," he said. "I've got to manage two dinners on Christmas Day—one at two, with Rose and her father; one at seven, with my dear 'Cable,' who has invited some odds and ends of relatives that the feast may be furnished with guests. She specially begged me to invite you."

"She is very good; but one dinner in barracks will be

enough for me. I've just been hiring plates at the Post Captain, and found Miss Kurney in high feather. I fancied you must have altered your mind about marrying her."

"Oh no, it's not that," answered Tudor evasively, and colouring. "I brought her a piece of good news this morning, that's all. I'll tell you about it another time." He went on to say that he had some other good news: his matrimonial affairs with Miss Truelove were coming to a crisis, and he wanted me to do him a favour.

"You're not going to ask me to marry Rose Kurney, so as to get her out of your way?" I inquired, with a laugh.

"No, although *that* would undoubtedly be a favour."

"Nor to marry Mrs. Plummidge?"

"No; that would be devoting yourself like the Roman who leaped into the gulf. I'm only going to ask you to come and keep watch for me to-morrow, Christmas Eve. Miss Truelove has promised to meet me on the Sittingbourne road at seven. Just read this;" and he put into my hands a little pink sheet of note-paper, bearing these words:—

"DEAREST GEORGE,

"I shall go to-morrow afternoon to help put up the decorations in Wedleigh Church. I shall return along the Sittingbourne road at about seven. Maria will accompany me, and we will wait near the South Meadow stile in case you should come. Oh, my darling, this Christmas makes me hope we shall see many happier Christmas Days together. How glad I shall be when all this concealment is over, and we may confess our love before all the world, as husband and wife.

"Your ever loving

"CONSTANCE.

"P.S.—You need not mind Maria."

"Who is Maria?" I inquired.

"She is Miss Truelove's maid."

"Oh, I see. Then my *rôle* will be to make love to her, as Mephistopheles does to Dame Martha while Faust and Margaret exchange vows in the garden?"

"Something of that kind," replied Tudor, with his cheery smile; "but I shall ask you to stand at a turn in the road, to watch if you see anybody coming."

I hesitated a moment, remembering that elopements with heiresses are sometimes attended with legal penalties. "What you ask is so slight a matter that I have no merit in obliging you," I said. "But I wish you would tell me candidly how matters stand between you and Miss Truelove. If I were your accomplice in an abduction I might find myself in jail."

"I know that; and, believe me, I should never involve a friend in such a danger," replied Tudor in a graver tone than was usual with him. "I may now tell you confidentially that I have every hope of bringing Mr. Truelove to consent to my marriage with his daughter. She is to talk to him on the subject this very evening. We have both decided that this is the simplest and most straightforward course. Mr. Truelove may object at first, but he is very fond of his only child, and will have to yield in time."

"You are certainly taking the best course," I said, well pleased at these tidings for my comrade's sake. "I've no doubt Mr. Truelove will surrender once he knows you, and I may almost offer my congratulations already."

"Well you may, for she's a bride worth winning," exclaimed Tudor enthusiastically. "She's not only as good as she is pretty, but she's a jewel in a rich setting. Six hundred a year of her own already, and five thousand a year when her father dies."

"Well, it will be the story of Young Lochinvar over

again. But what will Rose and Mrs. Plummidge say when they hear your wedding bells?"

"One may shriek and the other storm, but what am I to do? I have not the Turkish privilege of marrying all three. A time comes when a man must throw the handkerchief once and for all to his *true love*."

"That is correct enough," I assented; and I left him, appointing to play my part of Mephisto on the following night.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHRISTMAS EVE FLIRTATIONS.

CHRISTMAS Eve and the two following days were holidays in barracks. There were no drills. All the men were busy adorning their rooms; and, to add to their jollity on this blessed day, they received three days' pay in advance, with an extra half-crown added. All punishments were remitted; old Nodge's cells were cleared, and peace with goodwill were in the ascendant. The only fatigues performed were by volunteer parties who were putting up decorations in the church and the officers' quarters; but these men were rewarded for their trouble by the chaplain and the officers respectively.

On this day George Tudor was put into great glee by a hint he received that, if he resigned his berth in the library and betook himself to his gun drill for the next month, he would be promoted sergeant after the Indian draft had sailed. A sergeant after a year's service! It was a great piece of luck, due in part to the ignorance of those poor middle-aged corporals already mentioned, who could not overcome the mysteries of compound interest; but it was due also to George Tudor's general smartness and attractive qualities. He had insinuated himself into universal favour by his cleverness and genial address. The sergeant-majors and veterans liked him for his jokes; the officers'

wives knew his name, and talked about him for his comic songs and inimitable acting at the recreation-rooms entertainments; and the officers themselves, accustomed to see him always well dressed, smiling, and quick at his duties, were prepossessed in his favour. In fact, he had the good word of all those who can lend a young soldier a "hand up," and his prospects were as fair as any man nobly ambitious, or merely vain, could wish.

"I should be an officer if I remained two years more in the service," said he triumphantly to me, as he announced his intention of resigning the library berth. "An officer! Think what that means for a man who has started as a private! If he have been born a gentleman, it signifies that, thrown into the lowest walk of life, he has been able to assert his birthright and regain it. If he have not been born a gentleman, it means that nature committed a mistake about him, which he has rectified. Nothing could have given me more pride than old Harden's promise."

"Except the news that Mr. Truelove had favoured your suit," I interposed, admiring his enthusiasm and sharing it. "I do not suppose your promotion will be any hindrance to your love affair."

"No; Mr. Truelove will only be able to object to me now on the ground that I am not rich," said Tudor, touching his chest proudly; "but I shall be able to show him that I have birth, good conduct, and the chance of winning distinction in the service. I shall not enter his house like a beggar."

"Bravo, Tudor, go in and win!" I cried, delighted with his spirit, and clapping him on the shoulder, for his words nerved my own courage. "Perhaps you'll both marry Miss Truelove and remain in the service till you become Field-Marshal Lord Tudor?"

"*Quien sabe?*" he answered quietly, not at all viewing

the idea in a jesting light. "Remember, our rendezvous is for this evening."

I had appointed to meet Tudor on the Sittingbourne road at half-past six. I arrived punctually, with my long grey top-coat on, for it was bitterly cold. Tudor was in civilian clothes, with a deer-stalking hat, a fashionably cut blue ulster, and new dogskins. He smoked a cigar, and would certainly have been saluted by any passing soldier as an officer in mufti, so unmistakably erect and dignified was his mien. There was no label about his clothes to denote that they had been purchased by the too confiding Mrs. Plummidge.

"We are a little early," he remarked as I accosted him, "but she is sure to be before her time too;" and we sauntered down the road.

Sure enough, two female figures could already be descried advancing rapidly from the opposite direction. Tudor hurried forward; Miss Truelove appeared to throw herself into his arms, and after a fond embrace they turned and walked away arm-in-arm, Miss Truelove taking not the slightest notice of me.

Maria the maid had dropped astern; I moved alongside of her, and the following dialogue ensued:—

"Lawks! I should like to know what Mr. Truelove would say if he caught us here," exclaimed Maria, who was a moon-faced Kentish maid on the wrong side of five and twenty.

"Sweet Maria," I answered tenderly, "Mr. Truelove could not be displeased at finding his daughter and you under the protection of brave soldiers."

"Walker!" was Maria's response. "As for me, I know soldiers is deceivers, and I don't take up with such."

"You'll make me despair if you say that. Pray don't say it. Can it be that any one wearing the Queen's uniform

has been so base as to trifle with the gentle heart which I can see you have by your lovely face?"

"You're a sly one to talk, you are," answered Maria, looking at me fixedly. "And I dessay you're one as left an honest trade, too, to come and loaf about in a tight jacket."

"Too true, Maria: I was an honest baker. I used to work, naked to the waist, all through the night, kneading the dough they make bread with and the unleavened paste for buns. I was a great one for buns."

"Lawks! think of that! And what might you earn at this baking bis'ness?"

"I *might* have earned five pounds a night if my master had pleased to give me that sum, but it only suited him to give me three shillings and a half-quartern loaf, likewise a pint of beer, which I need not assure you was mere swipes."

"I always bargain for beer-money in cash, so that I can buy what ale I choose," observed Maria judiciously.

"Ah, Maria, how wise you are; your mind is unfolding before me like a beautiful book! What happiness it would be to sit with you all one's life behind a baker's counter, selling short weight of home-made bread and French rolls ballasted with alum."

"If I went into bis'ness, my fancy would be for a cap and ribbon shop," remarked she.

"Caps and ribbons!" I echoed. "Why sell them to others, Maria, when they would so much more appropriately adorn your own fair face? Ah, Maria, Maria! put your hand on my heart and feel how it throbs."

"I shan't do no such thing," answered she. "How come you to know my name is Maria?"

"My friend told me, and how could I ever forget it? Maria is the name I love best of all others on earth."

"I've a second name," she said, "which is *Hem'ly*!"

"*Hem'ly* is the name I love second best," said I. "*Maria* and *Hem'ly* taste in my mouth like delicious jujubes. But, *Maria Hem'ly*, this is Christmas Eve, and I think I've a sprig of mistletoe about me ; but if not, it will come to the same thing, for by right of old English custom——"

"Oh ! well, I never !" ejaculated *Maria*, starting back, for I had imprinted a loud kiss on her apple-cheek. "I'll tell you what, Mr. Saucebox, you'd catch it if my young man had seen you do that."

"A young man ! You've a young man, then, *Maria Hem'ly*," I cried, striking a heroic attitude. "Where is he ? Let me fight him ! I'll run to fetch the biggest of our guns and reduce him to atoms."

"No, you woan't," retorted the Kentish maid, "for you'd find him your match although he ain't a soldier; and, what's more, he's got some honest savings laid by, and that's a thing a respectable young 'ooman must look to."

"So it is, dear *Hem'ly*. If *Solomon* were alive he would make you a sergeant in his regiment of wives, that he might improve his mind with your wise maxims. Do you know, I've often thought myself that if I were a respectable young 'ooman and two young men came a-courtin' of me, I'd tell 'em to put their savings each in a stocking, and I'd place the two stockings in a balance, and whichever stocking weighed most I'd stick my foot into it and say, 'There, that's mine, and my hand's yourn ;' but, *Hem'ly*, I think I'd give my 'eart to the young man whose stocking weighed least, just to console him a bit."

"Ah, you may laugh, but savings ain't to be despised," rejoined *Maria*, shaking her head. "They just means good wittles and a comfortable 'ome, which ain't to be got by silly talk and kissin'."

We had stopped now, for *George Tudor* and *Miss True-*

love had paused about twenty yards ahead of us. They were conversing in low tones, and I could but faintly hear the murmur of their voices.

“How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!”

Constance Truelove handed Tudor a paper, which he thrust into his pocket. He grasped both her hands, and held her at arm’s length for a moment, then drew her to him, clasped her in a fond parting embrace, waved his hat to her, and walked away. Not to be backward in my valedictions to Maria, I seized her hands and exclaimed, “Oh, *Hem’ly*!” to which she answered, in a far less rapturous tone, “Get along, yer silly.”

Tudor’s step was elastic and his face beamed exultingly as he joined me. “Well, it’s all right; everything is going well. She’s to speak to her father to-night, and she says he already suspects there’s something in the wind, so that he won’t show much astonishment.”

“It will be a great load off your mind, and off hers, when the whole matter is revealed to him,” I said.

“Yes, yes; it will be. Oh, Dickson, she has behaved like an angel; she’s so good, and has such dear, soft eyes. Did you see her face?”

“No. I have only seen her at a distance in church, and just caught a glimpse of her coming out; but she wore a veil, and I should not know her in the street, except by her sealskin jacket.”

“Well, she is not exactly what everybody would call a beauty,” said Tudor. “Some might think her features too cold and classical, but they are not cold to me, and in my eyes she is the loveliest of her sex, and so devoted.”

“That’s all right, then, since you are going to marry her. You need not mind what others think of her beauty.”

"And now we must go off to the 'Cable's,' that I may change my things," said Tudor. "Mind, not a hint of all this before her. The old girl is in a rare good humour; she'll ask you to stay, and you must accept, for I dare say you're hungry. I know I am."

Tudor was obliged to go to Mrs. Plummidge's to put on his uniform, which he had left there, and it turned out that he had previously accepted a supper invitation for himself and me. On entering the hosiery shop, I at once noticed that the "Cable" was in the same state of bustling ecstasy as Rose Kurney the day before. Instead of the sour frown which had greeted me on my first visit, I now found her fat, red face all wreathed in smiles. She frisked here and there; she had smart cherry ribbons to her cap; she held out her hand to me. "Good evening, bum'deer. George's friends are always welcome. Come in; make yourself at home. You'll stop and have a bit of supper with us?"

"You are very good, Mrs. Plummidge, but I am afraid I shall be intruding."

"Not in the least; don't name it. There's always room for good friends, I say. We're going to have a beautiful piece of steak, with fried onions, and some mince-pies to follow. Take off your cloak now, and sit down comfortable by the fire."

She ushered me into the back parlour, where the table was spread with a fair white cloth. Mrs. Plummidge's ugly niece was setting the knives and forks; the boy of fourteen, who assisted in the shop, was running about with an important face, carrying plates. There was a glowing fire in the grate, and a savoury smell of frizzling onions ascended from the kitchen.

It was now half-past eight, and the boy was ordered to close the shop and put up the shutters. Soon Tudor came

down in his uniform, and noticing that some mistletoe had been hung on the parlour lamp, said, "Aha ! we must have some kissing now. Fair turns all round. Here, you first, Maria."

Romping like a boy, he kissed the "Cable," who returned his salute with hearty gusto ; then he kissed the ugly niece, who giggled. Then I had to kiss Mrs. Plummidge, who simpered and said, "Lor !" then I kissed the ugly niece, who giggled louder than ever. The boy with the plates looked as if he should have liked to kiss the ugly niece too, but did not dare take such a liberty in presence of his betters. The pleasing scene excited his nerves, however, and he dived downstairs to fetch the supper.

With a consequential air befitting the occasion, he returned, carrying the steak on a large dish. A hot-faced cook-girl followed with a dish of potatoes and a jar of pickles. There was a jug of foaming ale on the table, and we fell to upon all these good things with a will.

Mrs. Plummidge played a capital knife and fork ; the ugly niece ate as if this were the first time in her life she had ever been allowed to give free rein to her appetite. George Tudor played the host with an easy air of being at home, poured out the beer and winked pleasantly at the "Cable," who leered at him as though she would turn her left eye out of its place.

"Ah, Maria dear, here's to your health. This is just what I like," exclaimed George, lifting a glass of ale to his lips. "Home comforts—there's nothing like them."

"No, that there ain't ; and this'll always be your home, eh, George dear ?" answered the infatuated old woman with her mouth full of onions. "Just think how 'appy ye'll be when you're my husb—my assistant, I mean, and when you'll make a nice living in the shop instead o' being starved in those ojious barracks."

"Yes, selling sarsnet, calico, and threepenn'orths of cotton: it will be quite a new life," laughed Tudor.

"Won't it, duckie? Aha! I'll be bound you take to it like a little dear. You're so clever. Isn't Georgie clever, Mr. Dickson?"

"The cleverest man I've ever met, Mrs. Plummidge, and one of the nicest fellows too."

"Hark to that, Georgie, now; hear what your friend says. I'm sure it's very kind of you, Mr. Dickson, and we shall remember all our lives how friendly you've been."

"Here's to everybody's happiness," interposed George, to change the subject. "I wonder where we shall all be this time next year?"

"In heavin," responded Mrs. Plummidge, with a solemnity that made George start.

"In heaven, Maria? I'm sure I hope not. What can have put such an idea into your head?"

"Oh, I don't mean *that* heavin." She reddened and stammered a little, for the word had escaped her unawares. "I was thinkin' of you and me, George, in a earthly heavin."

"Oh, but we must think of others besides ourselves," laughed Tudor. "There's Dickson and your niece Maggie, they would make a pretty pair. Perhaps they will have agreed to take each other for better or worse this time next year."

The laughter which this sally provoked enabled me to laugh unrestrainedly at a buffoon idea that had just entered my own head. It had struck me as so stiff that Mrs. Plummidge should be coolly planning matrimony with George whilst her husband was still alive in an asylum, that I conjured up the vision of a *coup de théâtre*, in which Mr. Plummidge, having suddenly got cured of his lunacy, should walk in and surprise us all at table. Imagining what a face Mrs. Plummidge would pull, I laughed so much longer than

the others, that a look of pain stole over Maggie's face as though I were laughing at her. So I stopped and said, "Maggie knows better than to marry a soldier. If my head were knocked off in the wars she wouldn't know how to glue it on again."

"Lor', Maggie's only a child, and can't think of marryin' yet," said Mrs. Plummidge; but here she swallowed a crumb "the wrong way," as the saying is, and had such a fit of coughing that she had to be thumped on the back until the paroxysm was over, when she sat half reclining, with her cheeks crimson and her eyes watery for several minutes.

The mince-pies had now been served, and when they had been done full justice to, the cloth was removed, and some hot chestnuts, biscuits, sweetmeats, and port wine were put on the table. Then the hot-faced cook-girl brought in the Christmas pudding in a basin, which we all stirred for good luck; after which, Tudor told me to light a cigarette, and having done so himself, lay down like a pasha on the sofa, while his foolish old sweetheart sat on a chair beside him and passed her hands through his curly hair.

They conversed for a while in whispers, and I could hear the words, "Buy your discharge," "Money lodged," "How long will it be before you get it, dear?" But I was not paying attention to these fragments, for I had laid myself out to tell Maggie a hobgoblin story, in which I introduced a sentry who was so frightened by the apparition of a ghost that all the buttons of his clothes fell off, while his hair flew off his head and stuck like a wig in the inside of his busby. Maggie had been bred in the school of good manners which forbids a virgin to laugh in the presence of a male; so she blew out her cheeks like a balloon, and the wind, escaping through the fissure made by her lips, produced little noises like the notes of a trombone playing *andante*. At last there was an explosion, as if the trombone

had burst, keys and all, and Maggie sat very red on the edge of her chair, looking demurely at the fire, as though ashamed of her own merriment.

The clock marking five minutes to eleven warned Tudor and me that it was time to be off. We had to be in by eleven, and, having forgotten the hour, had to shorten our good-byes and make a scamper of it to reach the barracks before the gates closed. It was not till we were fairly in that I could talk to my companion about the evening's events, and communicate to him that droll idea I had had about old Mr. Plummidge suddenly turning up.

"By Jove ! it's not a bad notion," he answered, amused. "When I want to cut my 'Cable' adrift, I shall tell her that I've heard her husband is getting cured."

"You seem to me rather too tightly spliced to your 'Cable,'" I remarked. "Are you not afraid of Miss True-love hearing something of these affairs ?"

"It shan't go on much longer," said Tudor. "But, you see, it wouldn't have been kind to break off with Rose and the 'Cable' at Christmas-time ; they would have spent this festive season in gnashing of teeth, and scattered desolation upon all around them. I'll turn over a new leaf after New Year's Day. Hie, friend !"

These words were uttered after we had knocked at the door of our courtyard, and been answered from within by the sentry calling, "Halt ! Who goes there ?"

The sentry opened the door for us, and we went off to our respective rooms. All the men in mine had been indulging in deeper potations than I, and were snoring like humming-tops. I had to grope my way to my cot and undress in the dark, for after ten o'clock no lighting of gas or candle is allowed.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW THE CHRISTIAN FESTIVAL WAS KEPT.

CHRISTMAS Day. The *reveille* call seemed to be sounded with a longer and louder flourish than usual that morning by a bugler, joyous at heralding the greatest of all days in the year. Ringing of early church bells could be heard by the cooks as they clattered downstairs with their coffee-pails, wishing each other a merry Christmas and happy New Year; and before they returned from the kitchen with the bread, every man in every room was up and stirring. They might have lain abed for an extra hour, as on Sundays, but there was a general eagerness not to lose a single minute of the festive day in lazy slumbers. Besides, the band treated us to an early voluntary, marching through the different yards, and crashing out "Cheer, boys, cheer," and "The British Grenadiers," which were responded to with lusty cheers through the windows.

For once there was no grumbling and swearing as the men got up and limbered their cots. Hand-shakings all round, good wishes, men tumbling from one room into the other to hail their chums, and many of them bringing bottles of spirits. Foreseeing the amount of hard drinking that would take place before bed-time, I was uneasy at watching the tipples go round so early. Bill Short and the other veterans had each consumed about a tumbler and a half of

raw spirits of different sorts before they sat down to breakfast, announcing that they felt jolly.

There were no duties to be performed except falling in for church-parade at ten. The guard on Christmas Day is done by Scotchmen, who do not attach the same importance to Christmas as the English and Irish, and who, as a compensation, get a holiday and dine together on New Year's Day. I do not know whether this arrangement prevails in all barracks, but it did so at Sheerness. And the "Sawnies" on guard made no bad thing by this plan, for, besides getting as good a Christmas dinner as the other men, they were gratified with many presents of liquor and tobacco from commiserating comrades who fancied their lot a peculiarly hard one.

While we were at breakfast George Tudor rushed into my room with a face all radiant, and was greeted by everybody with a roar, which showed how popular he was: "Merry Christmas and a happy New Year, corporal!" "May you soon be a sergeant!" "We shan't forget your health to-day." When he had shaken hands all round, and said to each man something genial and appropriate, he called me aside, and communicated gleeful tidings: "Wish me joy, man; Mr. Truelove doesn't say 'No' to my marrying his daughter. Constance has sent me an early letter by a manservant, inviting me to dine at the house to-day, and her father will make up his mind definitely when he has seen me."

"By Jove! Tudor, I congratulate you," I said, grasping his hand heartily. "Your success is certain now."

"I think it is; but now I have a childish request to make. I shall go to Mr. Truelove's house in civilian clothes, and I want to look as smart as possible. I wish you would lend me your watch and chain."

"With pleasure," I answered, laughing. "Is there

anything else I can do for you? Do you want any money?"

"No, thanks," he replied, pocketing the watch and chain I handed him (I have already mentioned that they were valuable trinkets, worth about fifty guineas together). "I shan't look like the *premier venu* now. You won't mind my keeping them till to-morrow, for I've asked for leave till to-morrow evening so as to be quite free in my movements, and I shan't sleep in barracks. My game will be to strike while the iron is hot, and dance attendance on Constance as much as her father may allow me."

"Naturally; that will be your best plan: though I presume you will have a walk-over, for you have no rivals, have you?"

"I had a rival whom I have cut out; it was that coxcomb, Major Dandimont," answered Tudor, with a knowing smile. "When Mr. Truelove heard that his daughter was in love with a soldier, he thought Dandimont must be the man, for the major calls there so often; however, he had the sense to add that a soldier's inferior rank in the army might be an accident, having nothing to do with his personal merits, and that he would judge me *de visu*. But I must be off now, old fellow. Ta-ta!"

The homage which Mr. Truelove had paid to the army in George Tudor's person pleased me almost as much as if I had been the recipient of it. Had this gentleman been indignant at his daughter's dreaming of a *mesalliance* with an Artillery corporal, I should have been reminded once more of the despicable station in which I had placed myself by my follies; but here was a rich man who took an enlightened view of a noble profession, and was minded to judge each member of it according to his deserts, without accounting the uniform which he wore as a disgrace. So I was plunged into a self-satisfied train of thought.

Conscience had been pricking me for several days with the reflection that I ought to write to my parents. But a vile vanity withheld me. I was ashamed to own that I had enlisted; afraid to confess (lest my words should be taken in earnest) that I meant to resign the advantages of my birth and education, and sink voluntarily into the position of a common soldier. With a weak sort of purpose, I had bought some Christmas cards, which I thought I would send to my parents instead of writing, just to show that I was alive.

But after I had seen Tudor, better thoughts conquered me, and I sat down to write a short letter to my mother. I am afraid it was a very foolish and wicked letter. If I read it now it would doubtless disgust me as much as it contented me then. I did not say that I had enlisted, but stated that I was earning my living honestly, and hoped the time was not far distant when my parents would acknowledge that I had done my best to retrieve the errors of my past life. Just as if a little sincere confidence and humble show of penitence did not always satisfy the indulgent fondness of parents, more than a few lines of conceited bombast. However, the composition of my letter moved me to tears; and when I had enclosed a few Christmas cards in it, I put another card into an envelope addressed to Mrs. Laura Winkleigh, whom I was inclined to remember, too, in this melting mood. Having posted both epistles, I felt in a properly subdued frame of mind for going to church.

By church-time a good many men were much the worse for the liquor they had drunk; but, as several sergeants were in the same condition, no notice was taken of the groggy appearance of the tipplers. A few, who could hardly stand upright, were sent back to their barrack-rooms with words of good-natured pity, as if the occasion of the great Christian festival amply excused them for making beasts of

themselves. The church-parade was in the same style as on Sundays, except that the number of men on leave had reduced each battery to the proportions of a mere squad. Only the men of the Anglican persuasion paraded, for the Presbyterians and Roman Catholics used to go to worship in detachments, commanded by non-commissioned officers of their own faiths. Full dress uniform and side-arms were worn, but the men carried Prayer-books in lieu of carbines. All the officers were present; and the band played the familiar "Church Call," in which the chiming of bells is imitated with enlivening effect. At the words "Form fours!" the officers fell in beside their respective batteries, and the garrison stepped to church under the admiring eyes of the customary throng of nursemaids, children, and quidnuncs.

The garrison church stands just within the large extent of ground in which the barracks and dockyard are enclosed. It was frequented by some civilians; but the majority of those who attended it were connected with the army and navy. The non-commissioned officers and soldiers sat in the galleries; down below were the officers and the families of those among them who were married. In a large square pew near the altar one could generally behold the rear-admiral commanding the station, with three or four naval officers in undress uniform; in another pew sat the commandant of the military garrison, an Engineer colonel, who used to come to church in a gorgeous cocked hat with red and white plumes. Old Mr. Slocock, the schoolmaster, was a permanent curiosity in the lower pews, sporting a uniform which presented the maximum amount of blue skirt with the minimum of ornament.

There was nothing remarkable in the church, which was built in days when sacred edifices were made to look as much as possible like music-halls, or in the services, which were plain as the building, or in the chaplain's sermons,

which had no merit but brevity. On Christmas Day, however, the beautiful hymn "Hark! the herald-angels sing," drew forth a more vigorous chorus of soldier voices than usual. During service I cast frequent glances downstairs to get a good view of Miss Constance Truelove, but I was placed at such an angle that I could only obtain occasional glimpses of her face. She was very devotional in her posturing, and during all the prayers knelt with her head bent, as if her heart echoed every word that was being spoken in the reading-desk. Her father was a business-like man, with grey whiskers and a bald head. Another young lady and three boys were in Mr. Truelove's pew, and I concluded they must be some of Miss Constance's cousins.

Being curious to see this heroine close, I made haste to run downstairs after the service, and saw her plainly as she came out. O ye gods, what a deception! Tudor had said that perhaps "everybody would not think her beautiful," but the unhappy girl had not a feature that was pretty. She was tall and stylish, but had a chlorotic complexion and sharp features, with a long nose pink from the cold, which nose was evidently destined as she advanced in years to derive an indelible mauve tint from the weakness of her blood circulation. Now a great deal of George Tudor's success in courtship stood explained. This deuce of a man made his way with women by choosing the ugliest among them, and wooing them in such language as they had never heard—or were likely to hear—from any other human being. Small wonder that Miss Truelove should have become passionately enamoured of the handsome, dashing corporal, with eyes so large and tongue so smooth; and even Mr. Truelove, when he came to know my friend, might well feel that, for all her six hundred pounds a year and expectations, his daughter was a lucky girl. So far from Tudor running any serious risk of a refusal, it seemed to me more probable that

he would be in danger of an action for breach of promise if he failed to make good his vows.

Major Dandimont came out of church with the True-loves, but he was paying his attentions to the other young lady who had sat in their pew—a really pretty girl, who bore just enough resemblance to Miss Constance to show that they were related.

After church the men rushed off, some to help lay the cloths in their rooms, others to do a little more drinking before dinner. That meal was to be at half-past one, instead of half-past twelve as on ordinary days. In our room the cook had already laid the cloth and decked the table. The shields, flags, and greenery, the preparations for the feast, the cheerful fire, and the perfect tidiness of all the cots surmounted by the knapsacks and pouch-belts, and with the polished carbines in the racks behind, made up a picture which I was sure would draw compliments from our officers when they came round. I caused a tray with a bottle of sherry and several glasses to be laid on a cot, that we might offer the officers of our battery a glass of wine, which is a courtesy never declined on such occasions.

The dinner bugle. It was sounded at last, and the cooks, with a horde of volunteer scullions, came toiling up from the kitchen with iron baking-dishes laden with beef, turkey, sausages, roasted potatoes, vegetables, and what not. Then the big puddings, larger and rounder than cannon-balls, with sprigs of holly on the top, and the mince-pies, which were all set by the fire to keep warm until the meats were consumed. Now was the time for exertion. Bill Short did the carving, Bob Wilde drew the beer, Forringer uncorked the bottles, and I distributed the vegetables. We were not long; and the plates being filled, we had all just seated ourselves, when a sergeant tripped up the stairs, threw the door open, and cried, "The colonel! 'Tention!"

Colonel Spilman walked in with the officers of our battery, Major Dandimont and two lieutenants, clanking their swords. We all arose; and the colonel, saluting, said, "I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year."

"Thank you, colonel; we wish you the same, and to all our officers," I replied, speaking for the whole room. "Will you do us the honour to let us drink your health?"

"With pleasure," he answered. I poured out some sherry, and whilst I did so the colonel, who was always solemn in uniform, marched towards Bill Short, whose breast was all ablaze with medals, and held out a hand to him. "Well, my old comrade, you and I have served on many a hot day together, and this is to be your last Christmas in barracks. I hope you have a good berth awaiting you when you leave the army. There will be plenty of officers to give you a character."

I never saw a man so much moved as the veteran was by these few kind words. The blood flew to his face, bringing a lump to his throat as if he were going to choke, and large tears sprang from his eyes. "God bless you, colonel! God bless you, sir!" he said, wringing the officer's hand. "Me and my mates here wouldn't think our soldierin' days done if the Queen wanted us still; and it won't be a 'appy day with any of us, I can tell you, sir, when we throw off these old clothes which we've been a-wearin' most of our lives. Here's to your health, Colonel Spilman; a merry Christmas and a long life to you. Also to you, Major Dandimont and gentlemen."

We raised our glasses, and the officers had the good taste to empty theirs. After praising the adornment of our room, which they said was the best they had seen, they retired to continue their rounds. Bill Short, who was wiping his eyes with his cuffs, vowed several times before he was composed

enough to tackle his meat, that the officers of Artillery were "the blanked finest set of fellows in the service, and that he should like to go down into the yard and take off his jacket with any blanked cod's-head of a chap who'd say they wasn't."

With some such oaths as this, in some such spirit of martial pot-valiance, must the knights of old have sat down to their boards on days of high carousal. Soldiers of to-day and knights of old have in their hours of excitement much the same manners. We feasted less noisily perhaps. We did not draw sword, nor fling gloves into each other's faces ; but strong ale and Spanish wine, mixed with the liquors which had been drunk before, dispersed hot fumes into most of the men's heads, and set them talking at random. Everybody chattered and nobody listened. Everybody had jokes to tell which made him laugh aloud, or was going to punch somebody's head after dinner, and wanted somebody else to come and see him do it. Faces were crimson ; jackets were unbuttoned ; the atmosphere was like that of a bake-house, and a young-looking, very tipsy soldier staggered to the window to let in more air. But others sitting near the window were not going to have a frosty wind in their backs, and there was an angry scene about that. Thereupon the young soldier crawled to the door, holding on by the walls, and was sick on the gallery outside the landing. He came back livid and dazed, and soon rolled on to the floor to sleep. Other combatants, amongst whom Farkin, dropped off after similar accidents, and lay wallowing about the room like swine. Bob Wilde and some more, finding that every drop had been drawn from the beer-casks, and that there was not half a glassful left in the wine bottles, buckled on their belts and tottered away to go and have a "wet" in the public-houses of the town, though assuredly they were "soaked" already. The veterans alone remained steadily at their posts, flushed and savage to behold, but not over-

come. They had thrown off their jackets and sat in their shirt-sleeves, smoking their short pipes and bawling their reminiscences into one another's ears with excited gestures. They confessed to appalling crimes, as though nobody were present to hear them. One said that during the siege of Delhi he had, in the confusion of battle, purposely shot the captain of his battery, a d—d brute who had "spited" him. Another avouched that in the trenches before Sebastopol, having been surprised asleep by a sergeant whilst on sentry guard at the outposts, he had brained that sergeant, and carried his body to a ditch a hundred yards off, where it was found next day, and was buried without further inquiry, under the belief that death had resulted from a fragment of a shell fired by the enemy. As they related these dark deeds (which may or may not have been true), the eyes of the old soldiers gleamed with a sullen ferocity. They were quite drunk, but meant to drink still more. When almost all the other soldiers who could walk had left the room, Bill Short produced a couple of bottles of whiskey which he had stowed away in the bedding of his cot, and, pouring out this fiery liquor in tumblers, called upon me and Forringer to join him in some more toasts.

But I had had quite enough of this fierce feast after three hours at table. From the first I had made up my mind that, hap what might, I would not drink more than a pint of beer and three glasses of wine ; and I confined myself to this allowance, although the doing so was far less easy than it may seem. The very fumes of the room were capitous, and I had to shirk my drink without affecting to do so, lest I should have been shouted at as a kill-joy and forced into swilling by having my health proposed a multitude of times. Luckily the veterans ate and drank so gluttonously that their besotted faculties were not in a condition to notice my sobriety.

But I had a special reason for keeping quite cool-headed that day, and this was that I wished to look after Forringer. Knowing his weakness, and how much interest he had in remaining steady at a moment when a turn had taken place in the tide of his fortunes, I longed to bring him through the interminable dinner in a state which would not make him ashamed of himself on the morrow. For this purpose, I addressed all my remarks to him during the meal, and endeavoured to draw his thoughts to agreeable subjects. He was in high spirits, and talked gaily, but drank, nevertheless, at a ruinous rate. Tumbler after tumbler, glass after glass was emptied ; till at last he fell to talking with the old soldiers, and would have gladly stayed to fuddle himself with their whiskey, had I not drawn him away almost forcibly by whispering that I had something to say to him. When we were outside, I used the only stratagem that was likely to cajole away a toper from the bottle, by pretending that I was drunk myself, and wanted the help of his arm to lead me into the open air. This succeeded perfectly. Forringer understood that I was ashamed to show myself intoxicated in my barrack-room, and gave me his arm with the friendliest devotion. It was ludicrous to see him stumble downstairs three steps at a time in his grave attempts to keep *me* upright, who was not lurching.

What a scene the barracks presented! Men had been sick everywhere; one met soldiers walking in zigzags, bumping against the walls and yelling snatches of idiotic songs. In one of the courtyards there lay a pool of blood where a man had fallen and broken his nose. In another yard a circle of men maddened by drink were surrounding two soldiers fighting, whilst a sergeant, who should have stopped the fight, was lolling against a wall too drunk to prevent anything. As this sergeant was present, it was no business of mine to interfere, so we passed on. A little

further, we encountered Sergeant-Major Harden—the bluff, trusty Harden ; inebriate too, and rather shaky on his pins. He had been dining with his wife and children, but had afterwards been enticed into conviviality at the sergeants' mess. He wagged his head to us. ; “Pair of sh-entlemen both jolly. So-much-a-better,” he hiccoughed ; and that was all he would say.

Forringer could carry a good deal of liquor, so that the wintry air quickly revived him ; but I intentionally drew him towards the parade-ground so as to avoid the town, where the public-houses would have attracted him. My purpose was to take him for a walk along the river strand, which could be reached by the way we were going. Beyond the main-guard house is a road which leads to the port admiral's official residence, but seldom inhabited by that functionary, although there is always a sentry at the door. A little beyond this, again, rises a massive grey martello tower, overlooking the Thames and facing the Isle of Grain. The river shore at this point affords a nice walk in summer time, but one less delectable in December twilight.

By the time we had strolled as far as the officers' quarters we began to feel the cold, for we had not brought our overcoats, and our teeth chattered. The gas was alight everywhere, and Forringer remarked disconsolately that it was a poor time for a constitutional. “Don't you think we had better go into the town and make an evening of it at the Post Captain ?”

“My h-head is [not so s-steady as yours, Forringer,” I said, affecting to speak thick. “A-after we've walked about a little, I'll go and have a cup of coffee with you.”

“Yes, a nice hot cup of coffee,” repeated poor Forringer, still propping my elbow with his hand. “Come along then ; step out briskly.”

We were walking along the pavement that skirts the façade

of the officers' quarters, and we saw an awning over the door, betokening that the officers expected company to their mess that evening. We had just passed the Scotch sentry, answering his ironical "Guid evening, mon," when Forringer exclaimed, "Hullo!" and we both turned. A waggonette containing a party of gentlemen had just swept through the barrack gates, when a drunken soldier, lifting his arms and shouting "*Yahoo!*" caused both horses to plunge. Another who was with him repeating this cry, the horses took fright and, laying their ears back, darted forward at a mad gallop. The driver, in his attempts to pull them in, only made them swerve from the carriage road, so that they came tearing across the parade. All this was the work of a minute.

Going at such a rate and in such a place, it was inevitable that in a few moments the trap must be dashed to pieces against the foot of the ramparts, or against the wall of the officers' quarters. I had scarcely seen this, when I set off running as hard as I could to stop the horses. I ran straight towards them, till they were about twenty yards from me; then, turning sharp, made a spring, and, just as the team came pounding by, caught the nearest horse by the bit and was swung high off my legs.

A great thump against my ribs, a sensation of dangling in mid-air, but of holding on desperately tight to something with both hands till my arms started in their sockets, and then the carriage stopped. Forringer, imitating my movements on the other side, had caught the off horse by the mane, and, like a practised rider, had vaulted on to the animal's back. Between us we had pulled up the waggonette within a dozen yards of the ramparts, just when a smash must have seemed imminent to its occupants. These gentlemen lost no time in rejoicing at their preservation.

"Bravely done, men! Capital! By Jove! we had a

near shave," cried half a dozen of them, as they scrambled out of the trap; and a tall elderly man of military aspect approached me: "Are you hurt, my man?"

"I-I don't think so, sir," I stammered. I was standing at the horses' heads, holding the reins, and too much shaken to feel anything or to mind what was going on.

A groom now took the reins from my hands, and somebody led me away. A crowd of our officers had rushed out. There was a good deal of talking which I could not understand, and I suppose about five minutes elapsed before I was quite clear-headed again. I was then seated in the officers' mess-room, and Major Dandimont was holding a glass of brandy and water to my lips, while a large circle of officers in mess uniform stood around. Forringer was seated near me, and a mess servant was bandaging his left hand, which had been cut. After blinking for a minute or two, I stood up.

"I feel all right now, sir," I said, like one waking out of sleep, and I passed my hands over legs and arms.

"Nothing broken?" asked Colonel Spilman.

"Walk across the room," said the major.

I walked, and found that I had no sprain or fracture. It was then I observed that the tall military man who had been in the waggonette wore under his open cloak the uniform of a major-general, with the cross and ribbon of the Bath, and that another of the gentlemen was in the uniform of a rear-admiral.

"You acted most pluckily, my men," said the general, as I drew myself up to salute him. "Under God, Admiral Headford, these gentlemen, and I are indebted to you for preservation from what might have been a serious accident.—Their names are Bombardiers Dickson and Forringer, colonel?"

"Yes, Sir Rowland," answered Colonel Spilman; and to

us he said, "This is Sir Rowland Horseley, Commander of the District of Woolwich."

Sir Rowland and the admiral exchanged a few words in whispers with the colonel, and I was afraid they were going to offer us money. Perhaps such was their intention; but Major Dandimont interposed with a remark which I presume established at least Forringer's social position, for both the general and admiral said, "Oh!" and eyed us with interest. They then nodded to us, and Sir Rowland said, "You shall hear from us again. You have done a brave thing which shall not go unrewarded, and I trust it will be a satisfaction to you to feel that your Christmas Day has not been spent unprofitably."

Indeed, we did share this sentiment which the old general somewhat pompously expressed; and as we left the officers' quarters Forringer probably thought, as I did, that it was lucky we had not stopped to booze with Bill Short and the other veterans. The question now was as to how we should finish our evening. I proposed that we should go to the hospital and visit the unhappy "moper," who had lingered till this day. He had sent me a message in the morning, saying he should like to see me once more, and I had promised to go. Forringer, who was quite sober now, agreed to accompany me.

But on nearing the gate guard-house we fell in with Brigade Sergeant-Major Burlow, who found other duties for us. He had just been a round of the barracks, and witnessed drunkenness everywhere, to his wrath and disgust; for he was a stern man himself, who never exceeded just limits in anything. He had apparently not heard of the waggonette affair, or was at all events unaware that we were the two men who had saved the general, for he stopped us with a frowning face, and scrutinized us attentively to assure himself of our condition. "Two sober bombardiers at last,"

he grumbled to himself. "What's the matter with your hand, Forringer?"

"Only a slight cut, sir."

"Been fighting?"

"No, sir; it's a mere scratch."

"It won't prevent you going on picket duty, then? Go into barracks and choose the twelve soberest men you can find for picket, and if you come upon any drunken soldiers in the town, bring them in. You, Dickson, will have to go on guard in place of the corporal at the gate-house, whom I caught drunk on his duty, and whom I've locked up. Be off, both of you, now; look sharp."

"This comes of being steadier than the rest of mankind," laughed Forringer, as we ran upstairs for our arms and accoutrements. "The reward of your sobriety, Dickson, will be to sleep on a plank bed."

For all this, we were neither of us sorry to have been found by Sergeant-Major Burlow sober and fit for duty at a time when he wanted us.

CHAPTER XXI.

I GET HARD HIT.

To be sober when other men are not so, to be smart and ready for duty in an emergency, these are the small virtues which suffice to earn a soldier a character for steadiness. He need be no saint ; he need only exercise a little sense and self-control in trying times.

Notwithstanding that so many larks are winked at on Christmas Day, duty still has to be performed ; and those who forget this, or who push the liberty of the day to licence, are often sacrificed as scapegoats for the sins of many others. On Boxing Day, but more particularly on the day following, the list of "crimes" was portentous ; the prison guard-room was full, so was the prisoners' ward in hospital, and old Nodge's cells bade fair soon to be stuffed with prisoners. I was barrack orderly on the 27th of December, and have kept a copy of the list of crimes which I then had to make out. The offences stand thus specified :—

Drunkenness and rioting in the streets, assaulting the picket, or refusing to come back to barracks with it	...	20
Breaking leave (<i>i.e.</i> sleeping out of barracks without leave)		11
Insubordination, striking or insulting non-commissioned officers	7
Drunkenness on guard	2
Drunk and incapable on sentry guard	1
Manslaughter	1
Total	42

Thus there were forty-two charges of a nature so bad that they could not, in the interests of military discipline, be overlooked. To be sure, a great many of the defaulters were recruits who were not yet inured to discipline; still, bearing in mind how many cases of drunkenness had been condoned, the charge list was a heavy one.

As I made it out I felt much as if I were inditing the roll of killed and wounded after a battle, the more so as I noticed, with a poignant regret, several of my friends on it. Bob Wilde was of course in trouble—he had thrashed a policeman and made a football of his helmet; but Corporal Sloop—the colonel's pet, the guardian of the cricket-ground—was down also, for having when drunk shaken his fist in Sergeant-Major Burlow's face and called him a d—d spy. Corporal Rivett, my able tutor, had likewise forgotten himself so far as to sleep out of barracks without leave. There were other cases really pitiable. A sergeant of eighteen years' service, having three good conduct stripes and being a married man with seven children, had been picked up speechless drunk in the street by the town police, and had been carried to barracks on a stretcher—for which he was certain to lose his good conduct stripes, with rights of pay and pension thereto appertaining, thereby inflicting an irremediable money loss on himself and family for life. Then there was a corporal of fifteen years' service, also married, who had struck a sergeant-major in the face. The case of manslaughter had resulted from the fight which I had witnessed in one of the yards, and which the drunken sergeant who was present (and who escaped all punishment) should have stopped. The man who was beaten in the fight got so battered that erysipelas set in twelve hours after he had been borne to hospital, and he died on the night of Boxing Day.

I had just written out my list, when I had to run down

and sort the letters which had arrived by the morning post. Among them was one for me in Laura Winkley's hand. I opened it, merely expecting to find an acknowledgment of my Christmas card ; but one may imagine my surprise when I read this :—

“DEAR HARRY,

“Your friend George Tudor came to see me on Christmas Day, and, according to your wish, I gave him your luggage and your thirty pounds of money, which he is to take back to you. I am very glad to hear that you mean leaving the army, which is no place for you. You won't forget to come and see me in London when you've got your discharge. I suppose now you'll be going back to your home. Thank you for your pretty Christmas card, and believe me, with best wishes,

“Yours sincerely,

“LAURA WINKLEY.”

What on earth did this mean? I had expressed no wish to have my luggage and money returned, and had given George Tudor no authority to receive them for me. Then how came it that Tudor had gone to London on Christmas Day, when he had assured me that he was invited to dine at Mr. Truelove's? I took up the list of men on furlough and noticed for the first time, “*Corporal Tudor, 3 days, Dec. 25.*” He had told me on Christmas morning that he had leave till the evening of Boxing Day only ; but we were now on the 27th, and his furlough would not expire till this night.

I turned quite pale, and stood for a moment stupid. A hundred thoughts rushed through my mind, but the idea that I had been tricked and robbed by my friend could not yet fix itself on my fancy. Moreover, at that moment I had too much to do to investigate the subject further. I had to take my lists to Sergeant-Major Burlow ; after this to go and

copy orders at the office. Then I was sent here and there, to fetch this man and that; and it was not till ten o'clock that the pressure of work subsided somewhat. I then had to go to Colonel Spilman's house in the town with a bundle of papers.

On my way to the colonel's I passed Mrs. Plummidge's shop. Being on duty I had no right to stop, but I intended calling on the "Cable," and at the Post Captain, too, as I returned, to ask a few questions. As I went by the hosier's, however, Mrs. Plummidge, who had seen me from behind her counter, ran out and called me. The poor woman's face was very different from the jollity it had worn on Christmas Eve. "Bum'deer! bum'deer! have you heard anything of George?" she asked, almost whimpering.

"Yes," I said, looking hard at her, "I heard this morning that he was in London."

"Oh, I know that; but you've not heard how his mother is? He came to me in such a state on Christmas morning, saying he had got news from London that his poor mother was dying, and that he had took a week's furlough. He seemed almost heart-broke, poor boy, and wouldn't even wait to take his civilian clothes, but only begged me to pack 'em up and send them to Victoria Station for him, which I did early yesterday."

A thought struck me as I remembered having heard Mrs. Plummidge and Tudor talk about the latter's discharge. "Did Tudor tell you he was going to buy his discharge?" I inquired.

"Well, yes; I suppose it's no secret now," she answered, after a moment's hesitation. "You must have heard that he lodged his discharge money the other day?"

"And it was you who advanced him this money?"

"Well, s'pose I did," she began to say, reddening, as if this were no business of mine; but the expression on my

face caused hers to undergo a sudden alteration. "Oh, my goodness, Mr. Dickson, you don't mean to say you think there's anything wrong? Lord 'a mercy! no, it ain't possible!"

"How much did you advance, Mrs. Plummidge?"

"Why, a matter of eighty pounds or so. He said a corporal's discharge cost sixty pounds, but that there was some other expenses. But I say now, you're jokin', ain't you? There ain't nothing wrong—there *can't* be? Just come into the shop a moment!"

"No, I'll return to see you at some other time," I said, in a far from cheerful tone; and I left the poor woman in a state of consternation that paralyzed her limbs and even her tongue.

In front of the Post Captain a scene almost similar was enacted. Old Kurney was standing in his doorway inhaling the air of a sunny morning. His countenance was placid as usual. "Mornin', bum'deer," he said, with a nod; "bad news that about poor George's mother?"

"George told me nothing about his mother," I replied, and then came at once to the point. "Did you lend him any money to buy his discharge?"

"Well, it isn't no secret, I think, that he's going to marry my girl?" answered old Kurney, with a shy smile. "He and Rose managed all that between 'em."

What I had now heard ought to have convinced me that George Tudor had left us all in the lurch. If he had been raising money right and left on pretence of buying his discharge and getting married, it was highly improbable that he meant to set foot in Sheerness again. And yet I could not believe him guilty of such villainy. Though he had got my watch, thirty pounds of my money, and all my luggage, I yet clung to the hope that some satisfactory, or partially satisfactory, explanation of his conduct might be forthcoming.

Doubtless he had deceived me in saying that Mr. Truelove's consent had been given to his marriage ; but perhaps he had appointed to meet Constance in London to get married, and, wanting money, had raised all he could, purposing to repay us when Mr. Truelove's heiress should have become his wife. This would be bad enough, but not so bad as the heartless swindling of all who had trusted him. I could believe anything sooner than that I had been duped. Men believe in the gullibility of their neighbours ; seldom without cogent proof in their own.

I hastened on to Colonel Spilman's house. It was a nice-looking detached villa, standing in a row of new houses. A footman answered my ring, and when I had given him my papers I waited in the hall, in case there should be any orders. But in a moment the colonel himself came out of his study in an old blue flannel cricket jacket. " Ah, it's you, Dickson ! " he said, kindly. " Come in. You're none the worse, I hope, for stopping that carriage on Christmas night ? Sir Rowland and the admiral are very grateful to you ; they could talk of nothing else at mess but of having had their necks saved, for they are both men who set store by their lives. Shut the door, and don't take your cap off. A soldier mustn't take his head-dress off on duty. Do you know why ? "

" I suppose it is, sir, that he may have his hands free. "

" That's it. Now, let me see : what have we here ? "

Whilst the grey-haired old colonel raised his double eyeglass to scan the papers, I glanced round the room and detected proofs on all sides of his devotion to cricket. There was a little bench near the window, against which leaned three bats which he had been affectionately oiling. Each of these instruments had a case of its own, made to its shape and thickly lined with green baize. Lying open on the floor they looked like thin guitar boxes. Against the

walls hung pictures of cricket matches, and the table was piled up with old volumes of "Lillywhite's Guide" and heaps of cards chronicling matches of the past season. On the mantles shelf were three cricket balls, mounted on as many sets of miniature stumps, the stands being of silver and engraved with inscriptions. These were testimonials to Colonel Spilman's prowess in the gunnery department of cricket. One of the paper-weights on the table was a solid silver bat, ten inches long.

"This is a bad business of Corporal Sloopers," said the colonel, eyeing me over the rims of his glasses and shaking his head. "He's a friend of yours, is he not? I see he has put your name down on the list of men who can play cricket. Can you play?"

"I am very fond of the game, sir."

"That's the first step towards becoming a good player, if you're not one already. Sloopers is a capital player all round, but the foolish fellow got drunk the other night and insulted Sergeant-Major Burlow. That won't do; he'll have to be reduced to the ranks and lose the berth I had given him on the cricket-ground. One can't overlook insubordination. I'm sorry, for he was very useful to me. I was just going to give him a number of cricketing statistics to revise and copy for me. Do you think such work would interest you, Dickson?"

"Very much indeed, sir; I should be happy to undertake it."

"You shall have Sloopers's berth then. How far are you in your drills?"

"Sir, I have not got far through my gun drill yet. Would you allow me to ask you a favour?"

"Speak: what is it?"

"Might I be allowed, sir, to do what work you wish done without leaving my duty? Most of my evenings are

free and my afternoons on Saturdays. I could do a great deal of writing in those times; and there are always spare half-hours in the day, during which I could look after the cricket-ground, taking fatigue parties with me to clear off the rubbish."

"Oho!" said the colonel, looking at me a little archly, "zeal for the service, I see. Anxious to get on, eh? Have you volunteered for India?"

"No, sir."

"Do you wish to be sent out?"

"I would rather not go to India, for another year at least, sir," I answered, blushing.

"Well, well; we'll see what can be done," replied the colonel, handing me a new batch of papers. "It's not often a soldier asks to be left to his duty while doing special work; but you are quite right—quite right. Come up to me here to-morrow evening at six and I'll see how you manage the statistics. As for the cricket ground, why—h'm!—the arrangement you propose will work during the winter months; but when the fine season comes I shall have to put it in charge of an old soldier who can give most of his time to it. You know a good piece of ground requires constant care."

"As much as a garden, sir," I said.

This reply pleased the colonel. "So it does, bombardier; that is what I am always saying. Some men think that any flat piece of turf will do to play cricket, but I should like to know how they would play billiards on a table made of roughly joined planks, with a cloth stretched loosely over it? A ground must offer a safe pitch to the ball at every point, and to this end all parts of it must be kept carefully. However, I see you know all about it; so the ground shall be in your charge for the present."

"I am very much obliged for your kindness, sir," I said respectfully, and standing at the regulation three paces distant.

"I am always glad to befriend soldiers who deserve it, Dickson," answered the colonel, "though I am inflexible about duty—quite inflexible." This he said, I suppose, to salve his conscience for paying so little attention in general to what went on in barracks.

How happy I should have been at having attracted the colonel's notice, if it had not been for George Tudor's prank, which was weighing on my mind!

I was relieved now, at all events, from the fear of being drafted for India; but, under my new circumstances, it might become a question whether I had not better go to India after all. If Tudor had stolen my watch, my reserve fund of thirty pounds, and all my clothes, I was no longer in a position to buy my discharge. I might certainly write to my parents, confessing my plight, but how exceedingly bitter it would be to have to do this! I should cut a sorry figure in avowing that I had consigned myself to the society of rogues, who had stripped me, and that less than six months after enlisting I was obliged to scream to my family to extricate me from this new scrape. Anything better than that. As I had made my bed, so must I lie on it.

But I felt sick at heart, wounded, angry; and before returning to barracks with the papers, I ran to the telegraph office and wired off a message to Mrs. Winkley, answer prepaid, begging her to tell me whether she was cognizant of Tudor's present address, and to let me know what authority he had shown for drawing my property from her keeping. Having delivered my papers, I was free for an hour, and then set off for the hospital to see the "moper," who, as I recollected, had acknowledged that he knew Tudor before the latter's enlistment.

I had gone to see Edward Grimall on Christmas night, when I was on guard and was taking a sentry to keep watch over a defaulter in the prisoners' ward, but I had been told

then that he was sleeping and must not be disturbed. Returning the next day, I had been informed that he was in a comatose state; but now, on applying for permission to go to his room, I learned from the hospital sergeant that he was dead.

"He died this morning early, and it was a wonder to us all how he held on so long. He was very anxious to see you on Christmas Day, and I believe he dictated a letter for you to one of the men. Here, Brown, didn't Grimall give you a note for Bombardier Dickson?"

"Ay, sergeant; here it is," said a soldier in the dress of a patient, and he drew a crumpled paper from his pocket. "'Tain't writ very clear, bum'deer, I'm afeard; but thin I'm no scholard. The poor chap did want to see you very bad, that's sartin."

This was the unhappy "moper's" parting letter to me, couched in the clumsy orthography of the man to whom he had dictated it.

"DEAR FRENDR,

"I wanted verry mutch to see you, tho now I'm afeard it's Too late becos i had sumthing to say about a man I saw you with i can't say it on paper becos it might not be fare to him. Any how i Hope he won't serve you or others as he did me. I have had a sad life and i am glad i am going. Pleease cum to my funral you'll be the only frend there.

"Yours to the end,

"GERARD GAY, *alias* ED. GRIMALL."

Poor fellow! it was clear that he had intended to warn me against Tudor, and so my hopes in the latter's honesty became very faint. They were dispelled altogether before the day closed, for I received a telegram from Mrs. Winkley, stating that Tudor had brought a letter in my hand-

writing, which she would send me by post with further particulars. This message ended with the same query as Mrs. Plummidge had put: "*Is anything wrong?*"

That evening at eleven, when his furlough expired, George Tudor had not returned to barracks, and next morning he was accordingly placed on the defaulters' list as "absent without leave."

CHAPTER XXII.

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.

A MAN is not posted as a deserter till he has been absent five days, but the truth about George Tudor's misdoings leaked out almost at once. The men in my barrack-room had seen me lend him my watch and chain ; and this was a fortunate circumstance for me, as it prevented any suspicions that I was an accessory to his desertion. I got, on the contrary, a great deal of sympathy, which I ill deserved, for I was far from satisfied with my own conduct in having consented to accept hospitalities from Rose Kurney and Mrs. Plummidge, whilst I knew that Tudor was fooling these silly women. Looking back upon my behaviour, I felt it to have been base, and to have amply deserved the punishment it had brought, although this does not mean that I forgave the punisher.

The plunder of Mrs. Plummidge was not at once made public, for that light-principled lady had not much interest in spreading her woes through the town, but the non-commissioned officers who frequented the Post Captain soon brought a story of cruel wrong done in that quarter. It had long been known that Tudor was courting Miss Rose, and now it turned out that he had obtained seventy-five pounds from old Kurney, through Rose, two days before Christmas, saying that he was going to buy his discharge and a wedding

outfit. The girl was reported to be "squalling all over the place, and having fits that frightened the cat." I trembled now as to what might transpire concerning Tudor's dealings with Miss Truelove, whom no doubt he had robbed too.

The early post brought me a letter from Mrs. Winkley, enclosing a note which Tudor had presented as coming from me, and which was a most cleverly executed forgery. It would have deceived my own father. Mrs. Winkley's letter, written in a tone of undisguised alarm, urged me to communicate with her at once, saying whether Tudor had returned to Sheerness, as she had *particular* reasons for asking. I inferred that she also had lent the scamp some money.

As soon as I was in possession of her letter with its proof of Tudor's guilt, I went to take counsel of Forringer, by whose advice, after morning parade, we sought out Sergeant-Major Harden, that I might lay my case before him. Harden was furious with Tudor, who belonged to his battery, and whom he had always favoured and respected.

"The blackguard! Stole thirty pounds of you, and your clothes, besides your watch and chain, eh?" he said, perusing Mrs. Winkley's letter. He was evidently impressed with admiration at my having been owner of so much money. "Committed this here forgery too. What are you to do with such a man now they've abolished flogging?"

"I must say I always had my suspicions of Tudor," remarked Forringer, yielding too readily to the pleasure of being retrospectively sagacious.

"I'm hanged if I had!" answered the sergeant-major. "I thought him the nicest chap going. He would have been a sergeant if he'd stopped here another month. Curse him! it's these fellows that give the army a bad name; and it's they too who set the officers against gentleman privates.

When a gentleman enlists, the officers always think, 'Ah, that chap has been up to summat.'"

Forringer reddened ; but the sergeant-major was not thinking of him just then, or of me. "You must put in a crime against him, Dickson," he said, with a shrug ; "that's all you can do, unless you'd like to have a few days' leave to go up to London and hunt for him."

"I don't think that would do much good, sergeant-major."

"Doosed little, I should say, beyond making you lose more money. It ain't likely you'll catch the chap, so you must bear it as you can, and learn to be less free in lending gold watches another time."

"That was a beautiful watch of Dickson's," remarked Forringer ; "it was worth fifty guineas with the chain."

"More fool he for lending it," growled the sergeant-major. "Gosh ! I should like to know what my old 'ooman 'ud say if I were to lend this old silver turnip of mine to a chap who'd bolt with it. Never mind, you'll get sharper when you've served so long as I have ; and that reminds me you two chaps did a plucky thing the other night in stopping that runaway trap of the general's. You never told me about it, but there's a long account of it in the *Sheerness News* this morning. Have ye read it ?"

We had not ; and the kind-hearted sergeant-major, who really felt more concern for my loss than it was in his nature to exhibit outwardly, ran into the sergeants' mess, and brought out a newspaper, which he thrust into my hands, marking with his thumb a paragraph headed, "*Gallant Conduct of Two Artillerymen.*" The next moment, however, he resumed his rambling voice of command, and packed us off to collect the witnesses who were to give evidence at the numerous courts-martial to be held at noon. Work is the best cure for care in the service as elsewhere.

The proceedings of regimental courts-martial are quickly disposed of, being unencumbered with formalities. Half a dozen courts of two or three officers each held their assizes in the open air, and dealt first with the cases of common drunkenness and rioting. Most of the culprits, a dejected, hair-sore lot, with parched tongues, were sentenced to a fortnight's confinement to barracks. There was some hesitation as to whether Bob Wilde ought not to be given up to the civil power for his assault on one of the town police; but, as he had been brought into the barracks by Forringer's picket, he was sentenced to twenty-one days in cells, a sentence which the colonel afterwards reduced to fourteen days. The gunner who had committed manslaughter, and whose agony of mind was awful to behold, was ordered to be given up to the civil authorities pending the issue of the coroner's inquest. This man was tried two months later at the Maidstone assizes, and got acquitted on the ground that the fight had been a fair one, and that the sergeant who was present had not stopped it. The presiding judge made a few remarks about the sergeant's conduct, but expressed his concurrence with the jury's verdict.

After the regimental courts had done their work, a more formal district court was constituted in the office, to try the graver offences of insubordination, breaking leave, and drunkenness on guard. In this batch was the old sergeant with three good conduct stripes who had been picked up drunk in the streets. By a rare piece of good luck Corporal Rivett, who had slept out of barracks, got off scot-free, as the sergeant on guard had by mistake entered him as having returned before eleven; and though he had subsequently erased this entry, the original mistake was properly made to count in the prisoner's favour. The findings against the other prisoners were not published till a week later, as they had to be transmitted to Woolwich for approval; but all

these men came off badly. Here are the notes concerning some of them :—

SERGEANT BOWDER, married man, eighteen years' service : three good conduct stripes. Found disgracefully drunk in the streets. To be reduced to the ranks, and to lose his good conduct stripes and their pay allowance. The first part of the sentence was remitted, but the good conduct stripes were lost. If this man had kept steady over Christmas he would have got a fourth good conduct stripe, a medal, and ten pounds bounty.

CORPORAL BRANK, married man, fifteen years' service, three good conduct stripes. Crime : Drunk and striking a sergeant-major in the face. Sentence : Reduced to the ranks, loss of good conduct stripes, and 336 days' imprisonment, with hard labour, at Millbank. In consideration of former good conduct, the imprisonment was reduced to eighty-four days.

CORPORAL SLOOPER, one good conduct stripe. Drunk and using insulting language towards Brigade Sergeant-Major Burlow. Sentence : Reduced to the ranks, loss of stripe, and fourteen days in cells. The imprisonment was remitted, as the sergeant-major had mercifully withdrawn the most serious part of the charge, which was that Slooper had shaken a fist in his face in presence of a dozen gunners.

So much for Christmas jollities. But rewards are distributed in the service as well as punishments, and now the day had come when the insignia for good conduct were to be conferred. This is generally done just before Christmas ; but, for some reason or other, the ceremony had been deferred that year. The depôt was full by this time, as all the men on furlough had returned, and there was a large muster at afternoon parade. Several officers and about a dozen ladies came to witness a scene which is always interesting and often touching. The officer in command was Major

Dandimont, who held a batch of official blue envelopes, all closed.

We were ordered to form into three sides of a square and to stand at ease. Then the major, as he broke the first envelope, made a little speech about the good policy of sober and orderly conduct, adding that it was a much more agreeable duty for officers to reward than to punish. He next read out three or four names of old soldiers who had won good conduct medals. Each man as he was named stepped out of the ranks and marched to the front, where the medal with the crimson ribbon was pinned to his breast. The major tried to do this himself at first, but his fingers being a little awkward, he turned smiling to the adjutant's wife—a winsome and smart lady—who undertook the work, and acquitted herself of it very prettily amidst an approving murmur from all the men.

One of the old soldiers was granted a bounty of ten pounds with his medal; the others got five pounds. A man must have served many long years and have won his four good conduct stripes before he can get the medal, and the amount of his bounty depends on whether his punishment record is quite clean, or has a few peccadilloes on it. The badges of good conduct are neither won too easily, nor confiscated without serious cause. After the list of the medalled, the major named the men who were to have the good conduct stripe—fourth, third, second, or first, as the case might be.* To my great joy, Forringer was among the last. As he had completed two years' service without having once been reported, he had every claim to the distinction; but, as he had so often been passed over for promotion, he had not

* The good conduct stripes are, or used to be, given as follows :—first, after two years; second, after five years; third, ten years; fourth, fifteen years. They are worn on the cuff of the sleeve, in yellow braid by the gunners and drivers, in gold braid by the non-commissioned officers.

been very sanguine about getting it. To complete his satisfaction, the date of the award convinced him that this act of justice had been done before he had been instrumental with me in saving Sir Rowland Horseley's neck.

A last envelope remained to be opened, and I was a hundred miles from imagining that it might contain anything about me, when Major Dandimont cried, "Bombardiers Dickson and Forringer, step out." We advanced, and amidst a deep silence the major read this general order :—

"BY ORDER of Major-General Sir Rowland Horseley,
Commander of the MILITARY DIVISION of WOOLWICH.

"The General has great pleasure in making known to the non-commissioned officers and men of the Depôt Brigade, Royal Artillery, at Sheerness, the gallant conduct of Bombardiers Dickson and Forringer, who on the evening of Christmas Day, and at the risk of their lives, stopped a runaway pair of horses drawing a waggonette which contained a party of officers, among whom were Rear-Admiral Headford and Major-General Sir Rowland Horseley.

"In reward for their presence of mind and courage, qualities which must be commended to the emulation of all soldiers, Bombardiers Dickson and Forringer are promoted to the rank of Corporal."

A cheer broke forth from some recruits, but was instantly checked by the orders to wheel into line and then to form fours for a march past. All the men who had been rewarded were marshalled into a squad in front, Forringer and I among them. The band preceded us, playing "See, the Conquering Hero," and when we had gone once past the officers and the party of ladies, the parade was dismissed, as it is not customary to wind up these festive ceremonies with drill.

Nothing succeeds like success, so it may be imagined

how there was a rush of men round Forringer and me to pat us on the back, shake hands with us, and wish us joy in our great surprise—for surprise it was. To be cited for courage in a general order is no mean compliment, and it stands as an honour on a soldier's record so long as he does nothing to efface it by subsequent misconduct. If he behaves well it is a mark in his favour to all time. Forringer and I both knew that, but it was not bad music to have it bawled in our ears by the comrades who paid us their noisy homage. Some dragged us off to the tailor's shop, where in a trice a second gold stripe was sewn on to each of our arms. Forringer also had the extra stripe of good conduct stitched on his cuff. Nothing would serve our friends then but to escort us to the canteen, where we might wet our luck. The beer-engines groaned, pewter pots were clinked together and went 'round from mouth to mouth; we had plenty of good friends then whom we had never seen before. Ah yes!

Forringer's delight—which was naturally of a deeper kind than mine—lent quite a new beauty to his good-looking face and made him lift up his head at last as if he were once more a Hussar officer. Promotion so long delayed had come now with a rush, and for the future his career lay in his own hands, to be made or marred as he pleased. Never more, so long as he kept out of trouble, could he be set aside as unworthy of advancement. As he had made up his mind to go to India, he now applied at the office to know whether his application as a volunteer would be entertained, and was promptly answered in the affirmative.

For me, my second promotion, coming so quickly after the first and taking me forward two steps (that is, over the rank of full bombardier), was not the less welcome from the fact that it raised my pay to two shillings a day. Of the money that I had brought with me to barracks I had now only ten pounds left, a sum which to most soldiers who have

never a penny in reserve would have seemed an enormous nest-egg ; but which to me, who had always been extravagant, looked by no means big. Such as it was, however, I resolved to lodge it in the savings bank, and to add to it ten shillings a week, if I could, until I again became possessed of the thirty pounds of which Tudor had robbed me. As there is nothing like carrying out a good resolution at once, I went to the pay-sergeant's office there and then, and felt relieved after I had deposited my bank-notes, for I had been carrying my funds in my pocket ever since my enlistment.

The pay-sergeant, who had heard of my losses—for such gossip flies very quickly about barracks—congratulated me ironically on not having been completely fleeced, but remarked with obvious wisdom that if I had banked all my money in the first instance, I should not have lost it ; I should already have drawn a full quarter's interest at three and a quarter per cent. instead.

I did not feel the loss of my money so much as that of my watch. I missed that sadly at every hour, for there are no clocks in barracks, and the periodical bugle-calls imperfectly supply the place of timekeepers. A non-commissioned officer, too, has to be very strict in the computation of his minutes, for in making up accounts he may happen to linger longer over his work than is necessary, being disagreeably startled from it by the bugle pealing long before he had expected its summons. It was a cruel thing of Tudor to take my watch, for he knew that it was a present to which I attached particular value, and he was aware of its usefulness. The wearing of a watch is also in some sense a badge of character to a soldier. Be sure that a soldier with a watch is careful of his things, saving of his pay, and spends little in drink. If he were slovenly, his watch would quickly get broken or stolen in the rough life of barrack-rooms ; if

he were a tippler, it would be pawned to minister to his favourite passion. Not one recruit in five hundred has a watch at the time of his enlistment, and scarcely one in a hundred buys one in the course of his military life. If a soldier gets a watch as a gift from friend or sweetheart, the odds in favour of his parting with it before it has graced his pocket a whole year are strong; if he gets a watch at all, it is pretty sure to be a silver one, even if the chain be golden or gilt. The soldier with a first-rate gold hunting watch and chain of the same metal is a *rara avis*. He stands a chance of being called "Gold-watch" or "Ticker" as a nickname. Had there been another Dickson in barracks whilst I was a gunner, I should probably have been distinguished from him as "Ticker Dickson."

These musings over my gold watch, however, might have been much more bitter if I had not had the consolation of sporting a new gold stripe on my arm, and of having been mentioned so eulogistically in the newspaper and in a general order. I bought a copy of the *Sheerness News*, and obtained a lithograph of the order from the office to put among the treasures in my box, in the hope that I might show them at home some day. As to my watch and other belongings, all I could do was to bear their loss philosophically, trusting that chance might at some future time put me on the track of the thief, whom I should then bring to book.

I was to be sent in pursuit of him sooner than I had anticipated.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I AM SENT ON POLICE DUTY.

IT will be remembered that the colonel had ordered me to come to his house at six o'clock on the day following that when he had engaged me to help him with his cricket statistics.

On betaking myself there at the appointed time, I was told by the footman first to wipe my shoes on the mat (he seemed to think himself a deputy-colonel, privileged to give orders to the military), and secondly to march into the study. The colonel was not alone there; and his companion was, of all men in the world, Mr. Truelove.

The sight of any other human being would have been preferable to me, and I must have changed colour, for an uneasy conscience suggested that this gentleman might have been complaining to the colonel that I had assisted in deceiving his daughter Constance. In this case my new-won corporal's stripe might get brief notice to quit. The father of the blue-nosed Miss Truelove, however, was more distressed than angry; his flushed features exhibited consternation rather than any malevolent purpose. As for the colonel, his manner was all that I could desire, for he began by congratulating me on my promotion, and introduced me to Mr. Truelove as the "young man who had behaved so well in stopping Sir Rowland's trap."

Mr. Truelove bent his head stiffly. He had had enough of soldiers and their doings just for the present. A lean, wizened man he was, with a gill shirt-collar, a blue-spotted necktie, and shepherd's plaid trousers. Like his daughter, he had a long thin nose, tinted at the extremity. His blood circulation was weak; there were pink rims round his eyelids; his hands were scraggy and nervous, and he was constantly plucking at his garments with them. When greatly agitated, he would grasp the seat of his unmentionables, as if he were going to lift himself from the floor and remove himself to a distant part of the room. This he did during all the time that Colonel Spilman took in telling me his name (which I knew too well already), and explaining to me why he was there.

"This is Mr. Truelove, Dickson, a neighbour of mine, who, like you, has been victimized by that scamp George Tudor. Sergeant-Major Harden told me of your losses this afternoon, and I have spoken about them to Mr. Truelove; but his bankers have lost much more heavily than you, for Tudor has forged Mr. Truelove's name to cheques for *twelve hundred and fifty pounds*."

"Twelve hundred and fifty pounds!" I repeated, emphasizing the words in my astonishment as the colonel had done.

"Yes; it's a large sum, isn't it? Now, Mr. Truelove is going to London to communicate with the police, and I have thought you might be useful if you went with him. You could give an accurate description of Tudor, and perhaps state some peculiarity that would assist the police in tracing him. You were very intimate with him?"

"Too intimate, sir, as it now turns out."

"Did he ever let you know his real name?"

"He told me who his father was, sir; but I cannot say now whether that statement was true."

"Who is this alleged father of his?"

"Would you allow me to write down the name?" So saying, I drew out a pocket-book and tore off a leaf, after writing on it, "*Tudor pretended that he was the natural son of the Earl of Kirkport.*"

The colonel, glancing at the paper, gave a start. This is a very small world, and it so chanced that Lady Kirkport and Mrs. Spilman were cousins. Lord Kirkport was, moreover, an austere man, in odour of sanctity among the "unco guid" of the land. "This is preposterous," said the colonel, crumpling up the paper; but he soon uncreased it again on noticing that Mr. Truelove's legitimate curiosity was excited. "Here, Truelove, you see the name; but it's quite absurd—utterly incredible. As well say that he was the bastard of a bishop. I trust you, Dickson, have given no currency to this scandalous report?"

"Certainly not, sir; but I cannot say whether Tudor was equally reticent."

"Did the scamp tell you who his mother was?"

"He said that her name was Tudor, and he always spoke of her very affectionately."

The colonel and Mr. Truelove now remained silent for a minute as though uncertain how to proceed. They had not told me how Tudor had come to forge the cheques, and were naturally reluctant to introduce Miss Truelove's name unless assured that I knew something of Tudor's goings on with her. The colonel threw out a feeler by asking me whether I had ever heard that Tudor had been paying his addresses to any lady in the town. I answered that I was quite aware he had been courting Miss Truelove; and that I had understood Mr. Truelove to have given a conditional consent to their engagement, and to have invited Tudor to dine with him on Christmas Day. Thereat the skinny old gentleman stretched his throat like a weak chicken trying to

crow, but nothing came of this demonstration except a contemptuous cackle—"Give my consent, indeed! Pooh!"

"You surely could not have believed that statement, Dickson?" the colonel said. "You must have known it to be quite ridiculous."

"Why so, sir?" I asked, looking fearlessly into my superior's face. "Assuming, as I did, that Tudor was a gentleman by education, I should not hold him disgraced because he wore the uniform."

"Ah, well, no; not disgraced, of course," rejoined the colonel in a fix; and he tacked upon his course by requesting Mr. Truelove to give me an account of the forgeries.

The story which was then supplied me in scraps, partly by Mr. Truelove, partly by the colonel, amounted to this: Tudor had obtained possession of three blank cheques out of Mr. Truelove's book, and a specimen of his signature, which he had learned to imitate successfully. Going to London with the cheques, he had not been able to present any of them on Boxing Day, a bank holiday, but on the morning of the 27th he had presented one for five hundred pounds, which was cashed. Later in the day another for seven hundred and fifty pounds had been presented through a bank which had already given cash for it to a customer of theirs, and this second cheque was paid too; but as the amount thus drawn slightly exceeded the sum standing to Mr. Truelove's account, the suspicions of the bank manager, who knew Mr. Truelove to be a careful man, were excited, and a telegram was sent to Sheerness, inquiring whether Mr. Truelove had issued cheques for the amounts paid. On receipt of a message in the negative, the bank manager telegraphed again, to say that a clerk would be sent down to Sheerness with the two cheques; and that clerk arrived in the afternoon. Mr. Truelove had been staggered at seeing how wonderfully his signature had been forged.

Meanwhile, having examined his cheque-book and found three pages missing, he had, of course, suspected his servants of dishonesty, and had questioned them one by one. Then, through Maria Emily, the upper housemaid, agitated by terror of the policeman, the whole story of Miss Constance's gallivanting with the handsome corporal had transpired. The wretched father, at first incredulous, had thereupon summoned his daughter, who, after the inevitable scene of hysterics, had made her miserable confession. George Tudor had represented himself to her as a young man of family, who had enlisted because of a quarrel with his father, but who, having now inherited some property, intended to buy his discharge. He had promised that as soon as he was free he would get introduced to Mr. Truelove, and, after a proper interval, make his declaration and ask for Constance's hand. As to the blank cheques, they had been obtained in this way. Tudor had invented a story about having been ordered by his colonel to design a model for a new form of savings bank cheque, and he had asked Constance to try and get him a few blank cheques to copy from, promising to return them in a few days. The models, he said, were to be sent to the War Office, and the best one was to obtain a prize, which he was anxious to win. The foolish girl, believing his story, as she believed everything he said, had cut three leaves out of her father's cheque-book, "not thinking they had any value, or would be missed." She explained the facility with which Mr. Truelove's signature had been forged by acknowledging that a few weeks back, Tudor being in want of "a little ready money," she had lent him a cheque for ten pounds which she had received from her father for pin-money, and it was to be concluded now that Tudor had taken a facsimile of this draft in the copying-press of the regimental office, and imitated the signature until practice had made him perfect.

In the course of the above doleful narrative, Mr. Truelove had frequently caught up the seat of his trousers in a handful, as if he meant to throw himself across the table or out of the window. But a very sad part of his story had yet to be told, for it came out that, an hour after the exposure of her lover's crimes and infidelity, Constance had fled from her father's house. It was feared at first that she had gone to fling herself into the river; but she had only taken the boat for Chatham, and her father was doubtful whether she had eloped in some infatuated hope of trying to join Tudor in London, or merely intended to ask hospitality of her elder sister, who lived in town. This mention of an elder sister showed that Tudor had told me yet another lie in asserting that Constance was an heiress. Mr. Truelove had, in fact, seven children—three daughters and four sons, the two eldest of whom were in a City shipping office. He was not a rich man either, though fairly well off, and he was as nervous about the twelve hundred and fifty pounds as if he were going to lose this money. Of course, the loss would have to be borne by his bankers, but he was anxious to recover the sum, if possible, for their sakes.

When all the facts had been laid before me, the colonel remarked that there was a fast train to London at a quarter to eight, and that he would sign me a pass for three days. I was to give Mr. Truelove every assistance in hunting for Tudor, and my leave would be extended if it became necessary that I should remain several days in town. Mr. Truelove had kindly undertaken to bear all the expenses of my journey.

At this I muttered a few thanks to Mr. Truelove.

"Pooh, pooh!" was all that gentleman deigned to say, craning his throat again.

The colonel, as he made out my pass, wrote upon it that I was on special duty, and had authority to wear

civilian clothes. "I do this," he said, "because if by good fortune you should obtain a clue, you might follow it up more easily if not dressed in a conspicuous uniform. Have you any clothes besides your regimentals?"

"I am afraid they were all stolen from Mrs. Winkley's, with my money, sir."

"Mrs. Winkley!" echoed Mr. Truelove. "That is the—h'm—a person who paid the cheque of seven hundred and fifty pounds in to her bankers'."

This news gave me a heavy blow, though I ought to have been prepared for it. The colonel observed my altered countenance, and asked how I had come to know Mrs. Winkley. "Is she a respectable person, Dickson? You need not be afraid to tell me the truth."

"She is quite a respectable person, sir; she keeps a cigar shop, and I used to be a customer of hers," I answered, not thinking it needful to state under what romantic circumstances I had become acquainted with the widow—circumstances which I felt sure would never transpire through her. I went on to say that Tudor knew Mrs. Winkley too, and had, I believe, dealt with her for cigars; at least, so he had told me.

"Well, she is a very foolish woman to have cashed Tudor's cheque, if she knew him to be only a corporal," remarked the colonel, handing me my pass. "It will have to be decided whether she ought not to bear the loss of the seven hundred and fifty pounds rather than Mr. Truelove's bankers; and I am not sure that she would not be made to pay you back your own money and the value of your clothes. However, as to clothes, if you have no others you must make shift as you can with your regimentals."

"Pooh! I can buy him a cheap slop suit, if necessary," said Mr. Truelove, in a tone which did not flatter my self esteem.

I was then ordered to run off to barracks and show my pass to the sergeant of the guard. Twenty minutes later, having fetched my overcoat from my room, and put on my pouch-belt, as a sign that I was on special duty, I joined Mr. Truelove at the railway station.

He had bought our tickets—a first class for himself, a third class for me. Shy at all times, he looked now as if he were ashamed to hold any intercourse in public with a soldier, and was doubtless surprised that I did not touch my cap to him, address him as “Sir,” and offer to hold his bag for him, like a well-trained footman. But I was bent on showing this gentleman, before we parted, that a soldier makes some difference between his demeanour towards an officer and towards a contemptuous retired merchant. My respect and sympathy for Mr. Truelove were not what they might have been had his manners been better. Besides, since I had heard that there was a chance of Laura Winkley’s being held responsible for seven hundred and fifty pounds, I was far more concerned to save her from such a heavy loss than to see Mr. Truelove’s bankers recover their money.


CHAPTER XXIV.

IN TOWN WITH MR. TRUELOVE.

How are you to track a man who has disappeared in the maze of London with a large sum of money? This is the question with which I exercised my mind all the way to London, and I endeavoured to solve it by imagining what I should do if I were in Tudor's place.

The business-like way in which this gay despoiler had collected money right and left seemed to argue a resolve to form a substantial capital and make a run for the other world. But then Tudor was a sharp fellow, who must know that the Transatlantic highway is more closely watched by the police than any other. Even though he might meditate eventual emigration to the United States, he would not venture upon embarking for that country until a few weeks had elapsed, when the hue and cry after him would have diminished.

But Tudor could speak French well ; so perhaps he had gone to France. This appeared probable enough, and yet, if he had led a life of swindling before, it might be that he had reasons for not revisiting the Continent. On the whole England is the safest of all countries to hide in, for a man can go where he will in it without being asked for passports, or having to register his name at a police-office and give references if he intend to make a stay in any particular



town. Recollecting, too, how Tudor had questioned Forringer about Aldershot, and me about Harrow and Cambridge, it occurred to me that he might be disposed to visit these localities with an ulterior view to enact the part of a quondam hussar or Cantab in some new swindling enterprise.

I cannot tell why I thought this, but I did think it ; confessing to myself all the while that what I thought most likely to happen might possibly be just the thing that would not take place.

It was ten o'clock before our train reached London, and I proposed to Mr. Truelove that we should first walk to Mrs. Winkley's, which was close by. He assented, but dropped behind me, carrying his bag with an injured air, and allowing me to lead the way as though he should be hopelessly compromised if he walked abreast of me.

The tobacco-shop was closed, but a light shining through the glass over the door showed that the young widow had not yet gone to bed. When I had rung, Laura herself opened the door, exhibiting a tearful face, and addressing me at once in pitiable agitation : " Oh, Harry ! oh, Mr. Dickson ! whatever does all this mean ? " and she broke into a sobbing narrative of how she had been questioned by detectives, and had been obliged to go from one bank to another all that day, and had learned that the cheque which she had got cashed for Tudor was a forgery.

" When did you see Tudor last ? " I inquired.

" Why, yesterday morning, only about an hour before your first telegram reached me."

" And you have no idea where he went ? "

" Yes ; he went to the Charing Cross Hotel, where he slept on Christmas night and the next day. But we have ascertained that he only paid his bill and took his luggage. Nobody knows where he went then."

"Tell us now how you cashed the cheque for him," I continued. "Let us know everything without concealment. This is Mr. Truelove, whose signature Tudor forged."

"No concealment, I—a—beg for your own sake," echoed Mr. Truelove, drily. He had followed Laura and me into the parlour, and stood on the hearthrug without removing his hat, and sniffing the air with the expression of a respectable man who feels himself to be in a house which is not respectable. He had evidently conceived the worst opinion of Laura, and such an opinion in such a man was not likely to be soon eradicated.

Laura for a while did not answer, but buried her face in her handkerchief and cried; so I gently pressed her: "Come, Mrs. Winkley, tell us the whole truth. Tudor made you an offer of marriage, did he not?"

"Yes, he did, the wretch!" she burst out, as if the avowal relieved her. "And oh, what a fool I was to believe him! He wrote me all those letters you see on the table, which I was going to burn to-day, but the police said I mustn't."

The rest of her story came out in fragments, drawn by questions from Mr. Truelove and me. Tudor had been carrying on a correspondence with her since her visit to Sheerness, and had ended by proposing marriage. On Christmas Day he arrived in town, saying he had inherited some property and bought his discharge, and that I was going to do the same. In support of his assertion he produced the forged letter purporting to come from me, in which I asked for my money and luggage; and he displayed two cheques for five hundred and seven hundred and fifty pounds, saying that the signer, Mr. Truelove, was his guardian. On Christmas Day Tudor and Laura dined together and made plans about the future. The shop next door to Laura's was to be let, and Tudor proposed that they

should take it to enlarge their premises. "His talk was all bubble and sweet like champagne," said poor Laura. On Boxing Day he took her to dine at a fine restaurant, and afterwards to the theatre; and on this occasion he quite captivated her confidence by handing her the cheque for seven hundred and fifty pounds and begging her to pay it in to her account at her bankers', remarking that as they were going to be married they might as well have a common purse at once.

"Who would ever have mistrusted him after that?" added she, appealing to the unenthusiastic Mr. Truelove. "He spoke so nicely, and was so affectionate and kind, you'd have thought a nicer young man never breathed. Oh, the wicked fellow, he was every inch the gentleman!"

"Well, ma'am, but you have not told us how you cashed the cheque," said Mr. Truelove, displeased at so much lyricism, and he clutched at the hinder part of his overcoat as if a wasp had stung him into fidgets.

"Well, yesterday, the 27th," continued Laura, "I sent my assistant to the bank at ten o'clock to draw out some money for my Christmas bills, and I told him to pay in George's cheque at the same time. About an hour after that George came and showed me five hundred pounds, which he had just got by cashing his other cheque; but he said he wanted five hundred pounds more, as he had heard of an investment by which he could get a hundred pounds for a loan of a thousand pounds for six weeks on good security. My assistant had just returned from the bank with my money, which was five hundred and ten pounds, so I gave George five hundred pounds of it, and then drew another cheque, and sent Prugmann—that's my assistant's name—to the bank again. It was while Prugmann was gone on this second errand that your telegram came from Sheerness, Harry."

"And do you mean to say, ma'am, that you never had any suspicion when this scoundrel came to you for five hundred pounds?" asked Mr. Truelove, stamping his foot impatiently.

"If I had suspected him in one particular I must have suspected him in everything," answered Laura, plausibly enough. "How could I? He showed me the money of the first cheque which the bank had cashed; and even after I had got Harry Dickson's telegram, and went down to my own bank to see if anything was wrong, I learned there that your bankers had cashed the second cheque without question. I could not speak to George Tudor himself about the matter, for he had left me, and I thought he had gone back to Sheerness with Harry Dickson's things."

"Women are mere fools, ma'am," muttered Mr. Truelove, with senile asperity.

Laura shrugged her shoulders, as if she opined that there were some fools among the male sex as well. She turned very compassionately towards me, however, to say how sorry she was at having given up my luggage and money. "But of course I will pay you for all you have lost, Harry," she added feelingly. "I would not have you lose a penny through my fault. You shall have the money now, if you like."

"Indeed, Mrs. Winkley, I will not take sixpence from you," I replied. "I do not consider that you are to blame in the least."

"That is not *my* view, ma'am," said Mr. Truelove, with emphasis. "I trust you will see fit to pay my bankers the five hundred pounds which were thrown into a rogue's hands through your negligence."

"I shall consult my solicitor and my own bankers about that, sir," replied Laura, sharply. "Depend upon it I shall do whatever they tell me is proper."

She then turned to me again, saying she had discovered that day that Tudor had not stolen all my things. He had overlooked a portmanteau which was upstairs in a garret, and some articles of clothing which probably he had not thought worth purloining. This news gladdened me almost as much as if I had heard that the whole of my property was recovered ; and I instantly begged of Laura a candle, that I might go and reconnoitre what the extent of the salvage was. She wanted to go upstairs with me ; but I was afraid Mr. Truelove might suspect that she and I had some secret understanding if we left the room together, so I ran up alone.

Tudor had certainly appropriated the lion's share of my belongings. He had taken all my books, a silver-mounted dressing-case, a writing-desk, and a lot of other odds and ends ; also my newest clothes, cut by a tailor whose name was proverbial among well-dressed men, and the bulk of my sprucest linen. On the other hand, the portmanteau which he had overlooked was one which I used to keep packed for short journeys. It contained an entire morning suit, a dress suit, four shirts, some other linen, neckties, and two pairs of boots. As Tudor had likewise left a hat, overcoat, and umbrella of mine which were in a cupboard, not packed up, I had the materials for rigging myself out from top to toe, which I did forthwith. On my return downstairs the alteration in my appearance caused Mr. Truelove to start, imagining doubtless that I was somebody else—perhaps a dishonest hanger-on of the pretty tobacconist, come to ask him for “his money or his life.” But like Antæus, who recovered strength on touching his mother earth, so I recovered my native cheek in donning the attire of freedom ; and without further ceremony, speaking as if I were going to take charge of him thenceforth—I reminded my venerable companion that we must be off promptly to Scotland Yard.

We scarcely lingered in the shop a minute after that; and as we went out I actually had the effrontery, behind Mr. Truelove's back, to pat Laura's cheek and bid her not be down-hearted. She shook her head, showing that she was in no mood for jesting, but was comforted by my promising that I would return and fetch my uniform before going back to Sheerness. "Come yourself for it," she said sorrowfully; "don't send for it. I want to speak to you."

When Mr. Truelove and I were in the street I hailed a hansom. As I could not well share the driver's seat, my dismal companion had to endure my being seated on the cushion next his; but, indeed, the change in my attire had wrought a humanizing effect on him, so that he no longer withdrew himself from me as from a contaminating touch. He sat huddled up in his corner, however, and it was some time before he said to me in a husky voice, "Young man, whatever your name is——"

"Mr. Truelove," I interrupted respectfully, "it will facilitate intercourse between us if you address me as 'Mr. Dickson' when I am in plain clothes, and 'Corporal' when I am in uniform. Consider what your feelings would be if I apostrophized you as, 'Old man, whatever your name is!'"

"I was going to say, young sir," he answered, with a squeak, which was the highest note he could compass in straining at a dignified utterance—"I was going to say that my bankers seem destined to lose a thousand pounds through the freak of this levanting rogue. If you assist me in recovering that sum I will see that you are rewarded."

"You are very good, Mr. Truelove, but if I can help you in getting your own I shall only be doing my duty, and will accept no payment."

"Pray why not?"

"For the same reason that if you were to pick up a

pocket-book containing a thousand pounds, you would not accept ten pounds for restoring it to the owner."

"Pooh, pooh! our positions are not similar. As a soldier you can't be a rich man."

"I am as rich as you are, Mr. Truelove, if I have enough for my wants."

He emitted a grunt, and retired into his corner like a pugilist worsted in a first round of sparring. But this afflicted man was not yet reconciled to my military character, and he remained exceedingly pugnacious. When we were rattling down Pall Mall, he was ready to square in for another bout.

"I don't think much of that Mrs. Winkley," he said testily. "No woman was ever so witless. She is not going to persuade me that she did not suspect this man's true character. How am I to know that she and Tudor have not shared the proceeds of the forged cheque between them? It looks very suspicious."

"Remember, Mr. Truelove, that your own daughter was deceived by Tudor."

"Well, sir, I have not said that my daughter is no fool."

"I should be sorry to apply such a term to any person connected with you—all the more so as it would, under present circumstances, apply equally to me. The truth is we were all taken in by this man. Perhaps if you yourself had known the charm of his manner——"

"Pooh, pooh! I? What ridiculous nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Truelove, pulling at all his garments together. "The idea of my being charmed with any young man's manner! There isn't a young man in the world who could charm me!"

"Nor young women either, I dare say, Mr. Truelove. Recollect that for your case and Mrs. Winkley's to be quite on all fours it would have needed that a very charming

but deceitful young woman should have embroiled you in her meshes."

This I said knowing that he was a widower, and he metaphorically threw up the sponge. Perhaps he did not feel that his heart was cased against deceitful young women ; perhaps he was scandalized by my sauciness, savouring of profligacy. His pantaloons were sorely plucked during the short remnant of our journey.

CHAPTER XXV.

SCOTLAND YARD.

OUR visit to Scotland Yard raised the drooping spirits of Mr. Truelove. Civility and a great pretence of being active, zealous, and cock-sure of capturing any man wanted within a week at latest, are the characteristic signs of the men engaged in the work of thief-finding. Every man or woman who comes to them with a complaint states it as though it were something unique in the annals of crime, and as though the particular criminal wanted were a monster of his kind, who ought easily to be known amongst a thousand by his exceptional blackness. The police have to humour these fancies, coming from minds excited by wrong and athirst for vengeance. If they showed themselves callous or apathetic, the public would soon clamour in a way that would force them to mend their manners. In self-defence they are obliged to feign possessing all the acuteness, diligence, and omniscience with which they are too idly credited.

But, after all, what the police can do is little, unless clues are supplied to them. A police-sergeant in a railed pen took Mr. Truelove's charge, and was attentive in noting my description of George Tudor. When I mentioned Harrow and Cambridge as places which he might possibly visit, these names were jotted down. Encouraged by this, Mr. Truelove advised that inquiries should be instituted "at all the hotels," in case the fugitive were still in London. With

imperturbable politeness the sergeant promised that this valuable suggestion should be attended to. If Mr. Truelove had reflected on the number of London hotels, on the number of young men who alight in them daily, and on the general obtuseness of the porters at these establishments when asked to describe the persons residing in them, he would have seen that even if the whole detective force of four hundred men had been sent to search the hotels, they would scarcely, even with a photograph, have unearthed their man except by a hazard.

But we had no photograph of Tudor. The sergeant asked me whether I could remember anything else about that "party." Yes. I told him the story of the "moper," who being dead now, poor fellow, could not be harmed by it. The "moper" had signed himself "Gerard Gay," and confessed to having led a life of crime, though he had denied ever having been in prison. This might or might not be true; but if the name of Gerard Gay stood on the police books, some accidental clue might be found through it to the identity of George Tudor, who had perhaps been one of Gerard's associates.

It was a very slender chance; but the sergeant, who had hearkened without a word, wrote something on a slip of paper, handed it to a man in plain clothes, and requested us to sit down for a little and wait.

In a very short time we were summoned into another room, where a policeman was turning over the leaves of a large ledger marked "G." It was full of photographs, and of notes recording the antecedents of the originals of these likenesses. "There are several Gays here," said the policeman. "Can you find the party you spoke of among them?"

He turned a page, and there was the photograph of George Tudor himself!

He was not in ordinary clothes, but in prison dress, his hair cropped, his face shaved. On the breast of his parti-coloured jacket hung a plate with a number on it. There was no mistaking the man, much as his hang-dog expression in this portrait differed from the brightness of his features as I had always known them. "That is the very man," I said, after a moment of silent astonishment.

"The man who died at Sheerness?" asked Mr. Truelove.

"No, George Tudor, who seems to have borne the name of Gay too."

"Why, you said he was good looking," exclaimed the irascible old gentleman, glad to score a triumph off me at last. "Pooh! he is as vulgar looking a criminal as any I have ever seen. What sane man could ever have been duped by such a face as that?"

"Well, prison clothes don't much improve a man's appearance, sir," remarked the policeman.

"Nor is a cheerful expression promoted by having to sit compulsorily for one's photograph in them," I added.

Mr. Truelove and I were now scanning George Tudor's record, which was not very long, but significant:

"GERARD GAY, *alias* Harold Gay, *alias* Montague, *alias* Grosvenor, *alias* Lord Inajiffey, *alias* Honourable Ronald Jiffey (real name supposed to be Harold Gay), twenty-four years old. Convicted Middlesex Sessions, 187-, of obtaining money by false pretences; six months' imprisonment. Two charges of passing fictitious cheques under the name of Lord Inajiffey (eldest son of Earl of Kirkport) withdrawn, the prisoner's friends having paid the money. Previous conviction in Paris, 186-; six months for swindling tradespeople. Several other charges at different times compromised by payments. Is said to be the son of Miss Lucy Gay, lately an actress. Alleges himself to be a natural son of Lord Kirkport. Has a half-brother or cousin (*vide* G.

Gay, *alias* Rickwood), a bad character too, and a sister, Miss Florence Gayhard, an actress."

I turned the page and now came upon another portrait, in whose lineaments I vaguely discerned those of Edward Grimall. The "moper," when I knew him, was so wasted by consumption that he had little in common with the handsome, well-dressed stripling (not in prison clothes) who was catalogued as Gerard Gay, *alias* Rickwood. His resemblance to George Tudor was, however, tolerably strong. The "moper's" record did not mention any conviction, but stated that he was wanted on suspicion of picking pockets, and had once been arrested by mistake for an offence committed by his relative, Harold Gay, who had assumed his name of Gerard, and had been convicted under it at the Middlesex Sessions. This must have been the occurrence alluded to by the "moper" in his letter to me, when he said he hoped Tudor would not serve me or others as the latter had served *him*.

But what a drama was involved in the relationship of these two brothers, Harold and Gerard (if brothers they were), both criminals, and one dying in a soldier's hospital, without the other caring a pin for his fate! I could not remember that a glance of affection had passed between them. George Tudor had not once visited Edward Grimall on his deathbed, but had warned me against him as a liar; while the "moper," in dying, had been anxious to warn me against Tudor as a thief. Such an unnatural estrangement could only have arisen through the two wretched young men having never had at any time in their lives a happy home, where memories could forge a link between them. They must have been hardened into selfishness when boys, from having been brought up amid deceit or vice; and thinking of this, I felt some pity for the castaways, even for the worst of the two, who had robbed me.

The perusal of these police records, however, lent me another subject of reflection, for the reader will not have forgotten that Miss Florence Gayhard was the actress to whom I had sent *billets doux*, and at whose house in St. John's Wood I had lost a hundred and fifty pounds on the gaming-table. She had been the ultimate cause of my enlistment. Hearing now that she was Tudor's sister, I could not but wonder whether she and her brother were still on friendly terms, and I determined to find this out before going to bed. It was then a quarter to midnight, and by driving straight to the Lyceum we might still be in time to see Miss Florence before she left the theatre. So, whispering a few words to Mr. Truelove, I drew him away, eager enough for any errand that gave him a hope of getting his money back. We thanked the police for their civility, and in another minute had jumped into our hansom again and were bowling up the Strand.

"This will be a wild-goose chase," mumbled Mr. Truelove, who had made up his mind to be pleased with nothing that was done on his behalf.

"No matter if the goose have the golden eggs," I replied, equally resolved not to let him have the last shot when he opened fire.

"Is this Miss Gayhard a—a friend of yours?" he inquired next, with a sniff.

"Not a friend of mine, but I know her."

It now struck me that Miss Florence knew me under my real name, which was not Dickson, and as she might pronounce that other name in Mr. Truelove's hearing, I deemed it expedient to prepare him. "Mr. Truelove," I said, "I am speaking confidentially when I mention that I knew Miss Florence Gayhard before I entered the army, and when my name was not what it is now."

"What, you have an *alias* too?" he answered in a tone of marked disgust.

"An *alias* if you will. I did not want my family to know I had enlisted."

"But I was under the impression that soldiers, on their enlistment, had to make an attestation on oath, before a magistrate, that they had given a truthful account of themselves?"

"Yes, but it is the custom with many to assume what we call regimental names."

"The custom to commit perjury?" asked Mr. Truelove, who, now having got my nob into Chancery, as it were, made free play upon it.

"There is no perjury in it," I retorted, trying to keep serene, though my cheeks flamed. "I was not asked to swear to my father's name, but to my own. I chose to assume the name of Dickson for my career as a soldier, and so it was my own at the time when I swore to it."

"Well, sir, and how can this casuistry of yours—a—interest me?"

"I only told you thinking you might feel surprised at hearing me addressed by a new name."

"Pooh, pooh!" said Mr. Truelove, with another of his fidgety sniffs. "Nothing at all could surprise me coming from a soldier."

I had not felt so hot and uncomfortable for a long time; and it must be taken as a proof of my good manners and veneration for age, that I assisted Mr. Truelove to alight when we reached the Lyceum, instead of catching him round the waist and whirling him in an enraged dance up and down the pavement.

The spectators had all left the theatre and the doors were being closed, but the porter at the stage-entrance informed us that Miss Gayhard had not yet gone; her brougham was standing over the way. Begging for a piece of paper, I wrote a few lines in pencil, and requested the

porter to carry them up to the young lady. This cost me half a crown, for the porter began by saying that he "didn't do such things," but when Mr. Truelove had muttered something about Scotland Yard, he was off like a shot.

I had apprised Miss Gayhard that I desired to see her, with a stranger, on very important business concerning her brothers. The porter returned with a verbal message that Miss Gayhard could not see me at the theatre, as she was just going to leave, but that she would speak to me at her own house at St. John's Wood, if I liked to meet her there. Accordingly, Mr. Truelove and I got into our cab again. "I don't know when I shall get to bed," moaned this morose old man, as we started, but he had silenced my batteries for the present, and I did not unseal my lips through the whole of the drive.

Late as it was, Miss Gayhard's house was not wrapped in gloom. She was a young lady who kept early hours, going to bed at about three a.m., and breakfasting at one in the afternoon. The hall was brilliantly lighted, and the footman who admitted us did so without asking any question whatever. He helped me to remove my overcoat (Mr. Truelove declined to part with his), and ushered us into a beautifully furnished boudoir on the ground floor. The carpet was so thick that one seemed to tread on soft moss, and all the chair and sofa coverings were of richly flowered satin. Beyond an open doorway festooned with curtains of blue satin and lace, was a dining-room wainscotted with carved oak, and containing a table sumptuously laid out for supper. Bohemian glass, flowers, and costly china adorned the cloth. On the oaken buffet was a massive array of silver jugs and tankards.

The sight of all this magnificence produced its effect on Mr. Truelove, but it was not a chafing one. He turned up his nose and assumed a severely virtuous air. Not caring

to encounter another volley of his sarcasms, I took up an album from the table, and, throwing myself into an armchair near the fire, made myself cosy.

Soon we heard a brougham draw up at the door, and the mirthful voices of two young women resounded in the hall. Almost immediately afterwards another brougham clattered up, then a third, and some voices of young men became audible. There was a little whispering outside, and most of the company trooped upstairs; the next minute the door opened, and Miss Gayhard sailed in wrapped in an ample silk cloak lined with sable.

She looked uncommonly pretty and passably dignified as she held out her hand to me. "What's this terrible news about my brothers?" she began, without a sign of fright; then, bending her head slightly towards Mr. Truelove, "Who is this gentleman?"

I presented: "Mr. Truelove of Sheerness. I am sorry to say your brother Harold has forged this gentleman's signature, Miss Gayhard. He is also a deserter from the army."

"He has been up to his old tricks, then. I saw him at the Lyceum to-night, and he told me he had won a thousand pounds at Monaco."

"Ah, he was at the Lyceum, you see; if we had gone earlier we should have seen him," ejaculated Mr. Truelove, turning peevishly upon me, just as if he had been suggesting the whole evening that we should go to the Lyceum and I had prevented him. "Can you tell me, ma'am, where your brother is?"

"I would not if I could," replied the actress coldly. "Neither of my brothers are anything to me, but it's no business of mine to push them into trouble."

"Every person owes a duty to society, ma'am."

"Do you call yourself society?" asked Miss Gayhard, with contemptuous mockery in her bright eyes.

I had now assisted her to take off her cloak and hat, and she stood before us in a close-fitting dress (it looked like a sheath) of black satin. There was not an article of jewelry about her, but hanging to a silken cord round her waist was a fan of ostrich feathers. Her lovely head with its crown of wavy curls would have been a model for any artist painting a siren, but there was nothing soft about the outlines of her well-cut mouth. "Look here, gentlemen," she said, standing between us and placing a small foot on the steel bar of the fender, but speaking rather to herself in the looking-glass than to us. "I don't know why you come to me because my brothers have got into a scrape. We are only brothers in a way: we are not children of the same father; we were not brought up together. If I went to the dogs they would do nothing for me, and I have done more for them—at least for Harold—than I should do again to save him from any fate he had deserved."

"Your brother Gerard is dead, Miss Gayhard," I said gravely.

"Dead, is he?" she answered, glancing quickly at me, and she became serious a moment. "Well, so much the better," she added, not brutally, but as though expressing a sentiment she really felt. "Where and how did he die?"

"He had enlisted, and died of consumption at Sheerness."

"He might have done better—or worse," she rejoined quietly. "Well, there is one of them out of the way then. Gerard was never much to me, nor I to him. As for Harold, I have lent him money till I am sick of it. I tried to help him on in every sort of way, till he took to swindling my acquaintances; then I had to turn him out of my house. If you want to hear more about him you had better speak to my mother."

"Will you—a—give us your mother's address, if you

please?" asked Mr. Truelove, pulling nervously at his hinder garments as usual.

"Oh, she lives with me here and keeps house for me." Miss Gayhard requested me to touch the bell, and when a footman appeared she told him to convey an order to her maid: "Ask her to see if mamma is awake. If she is, let Mrs. Gay know that two gentlemen wish particularly to see her on business."

While the servant was gone Miss Gayhard asked us if we would sit down to supper with her. As I had taken but a slight tea at six, and as Mr. Truelove had not tasted food since one o'clock, we should both have been glad enough to sup: but Mr. Truelove would not condescend to touch a morsel in such a house as this, and he refused without any civility, churlishly. Miss Gayhard had too much knowledge of the world to take any offence at his rudeness, but she begged our permission to have us shown into another room, as her friends upstairs were hungry. I was exceptionally polite to her to make up for my companion's want of manners, and she favoured me in return with a general invitation to come to her house and be fleeced as often as I pleased. "What a long time it is since you were last here, Mr. ——! I shall always be glad to see you. There is usually a little card-play here every night after the theatre, and roulette every Sunday."

"That is a miserable creature," remarked Mr. Truelove, with a pious shudder, as a servant was leading us to another room.

"She is one of the loveliest women I have ever seen," I answered on purpose to tease him.

"Pooh, pooh! Lovely? I suppose you would have had her be a fright as well as a minx."

The apartment into which we were now conducted, and where a fire ready laid was hastily lit for our solace, had

been fitted up as a library, though it was probably not often used for any studious purpose. The upholsterer who had furnished it had tried to realize an ideal of what the study of an actress devoted to her art ought to be. The shelves were covered with handsomely bound volumes, comprising a complete collection of the dramatic literature of all times and countries. What would not a struggling young author or painstaking critic have given for the privilege of working with such materials of reference at hand? But it may be doubted whether Miss Gayhard ever took down a book from the shelves, except when she wanted to consult an album of costumes for a dress to wear at a fancy ball. In this room we waited until it pleased Miss Florence's mother to come down to us.

Having heard Tudor speak often so affectionately and dutifully of his mother, I was prepared to see a lady who, if not virtuous, should at least be tender of heart. Instead of that we saw a lady who was at once unfeeling, foolish, and flighty—one of those persons whose hearts, if wrung, would only yield ice-drops. She must have been a lovely animal once, and was still comely now. She was about fifty, and when painted and tricked out in her day finery probably looked to the unobservant fifteen years younger. But having been summoned from her bed without having had time to rouge herself and settle her false hair, she was cross and flurried. Wrapped in a quilted silk *peignoir*, and with her head swathed in a black lace shawl, she seated herself in the darkest corner of the room, so that her features might not be seen, and frequently put her handkerchief to her eyes to conceal the crow's-feet round them. Our conversation with her was most tedious, for she indulged all the while in a hysteric monologue and would scarcely suffer us to put in a word. She was too experienced an actress to play the part of an unfeeling mother, but she let us see through her want

of feeling by hypocritical lamentations all tending to her own glorification. The announcement that her son Gerard was dead drew a whine from her, but it transpired that she had never given herself any trouble about his education or his brother's. Her two sons had been brought up "here and there," she said, and implied that they were almost strangers to her. As to Harold, "his father" had paid him out of several scrapes and would do no more. She, for her part, did not see why her sons should continually worry her. All her children had been a grief to her except Florrie, who was "a good girl." When Mr. Truelove asked whether Mrs. Gay would refuse to pay anything to save her son from penal servitude, she replied with a shrillness out of harmony with her former maudlin tone, "Certainly; I will not pay a penny."

"Well, then, we had better go," said Mr. Truelove; and we took our leave.

As we left the house my companion broke out into indignant regrets over the time we had wasted. "What on earth was the good of our coming to see these two vile women? The very air reeks of them—pah! Jump into the cab now; we'll go to Haxell's Hotel. I suppose I shall have to give you a bed there, and a nice cab fare I shall have to pay! It's a pity I didn't come alone."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PRIDE OF SOLDIERING.

I FELT much mortified at having placed my ten pounds in the savings bank, for if I had had that sum about me I should not have consented to be a burden on Mr. Truelove's grudging liberality. As it was, I had only about ten shillings in my pocket, and was therefore obliged to let him pay for my room. When we reached the hotel it was too late to get anything to eat, so Mr. Truelove went to bed grinning like a hungry jackal, and so wrath that he did not even wish me good-night.

As he had said nothing about breakfast, I went out at eight o'clock the next morning, and had a cup of coffee and a roll at the Charing Cross Station buffet. I was by this time very eager to catch George Tudor, not so much to recover the stolen plunder, as because it aggravates a hunter to know that his game is hovering somewhere under his very nose, and yet lurking out of shot. George Tudor was still in London, and had perhaps whisked close to us that very night. This was tantalizing, and I had lain awake in bed for some time planning what snare I might lay for him.

At nine o'clock I walked into the hotel coffee-room, where Mr. Truelove was tackling a fried sole as if he would devour it, bones and all, along with the sprigs of parsley and bits of lemon on the dish. "Have you breakfasted?" he

asked with a full mouth, in a more gracious tone than he had adopted on the previous night ; and he pointed to an empty chair opposite his.

"Yes, thank you. I hope you have passed a good night?"

"Pooh! a man doesn't sleep much who has heard that his daughter has been trifled with by a villain." Mr. True-love laid down his fork to pluck at his collar as he said this, and there were tears in his eyes. This touch of nature reconciled me to the old man, and I felt sorry for not having borne more patiently with his sorrow. The next minute, however, he was as cantankerous as ever. "I don't see much use in your idling away another day in London," he said, "unless you have any intuition where this rascal may be hid."

"I cannot even guess," I answered, "and if we ran against him in London it could only be by a pure hazard ; but I have thought of a plan which I think may succeed in bringing him into our hands."

I drew out a piece of paper, on which I had made the draft of a proposed advertisement, which I had very craftily baited to attract Tudor's notice. I thought that if he read it he would be pretty sure to "bite."

AS SECRETARY TO A NOBLEMAN.

WANTED, a young man of good education and manners. . Must know French. Preference would be given to one having had a public school and university education. Would be required to travel in Europe and America for about two years.—Address, etc.

"Pooh! advertisements are of not much use," was Mr. Truelove's sour comment on my effusion. "They cost money, and nobody reads them."

"I don't think money spent on this would be wasted," I rejoined. "Were I in your place I would certainly risk it."

"Were you in my place you would reason as I do. A young man is always for risking money that is not his own."

"Well, as to that, Mr. Truelove, I am not so destitute but that I can venture a few pounds too. If you like to insert the advertisement I will bear half the expense."

"Tut-tut ! that is mere bravado," replied the intractable old man, scooping out the contents of a cut-glass saucer full of marmalade. "The next worst thing to being careless with other people's money is to be improvident with one's own." Then, as he spread the marmalade over his toast, he criticised my advertisement in detail. If I limited the applicants to public school and university men, how would Tudor be encouraged to answer?

I explained my grounds for believing that Tudor would most probably answer in my name. He knew where I had been educated, the names of my tutors, and of my father. If he wrote as from me to Harrow, he would have no difficulty in getting a good character from my tutor at that place, and a copy of my matriculation entry at the university. He might even write to different people whom I knew, and use them for references. For the sake of getting a pleasant situation in the employment of a travelling nobleman, he would scruple at nothing.

"So you were at Harrow and Cambridge?" remarked Mr. Truelove, fixing his glance on me, and nodding his head several times like a china mandarin.

I confessed such to have been the case, for, as he knew so much about me already, I saw no reason for concealing the rest.

"That means that your father gave you an expensive education, and that you are turning it to no account. He put a costly steam engine into your hands, and you are using it to chop little bits of wood for your own amusement."

"I own to having acted very foolishly," I answered, sub-

mitting myself with good grace to the old man's reproof, as though, being a father himself, he was chiding me in the name of all fathers. "However, my education will not have been thrown away if it serves to get me a commission."

"Pah! that means that if you became an officer you would kindly write to your father and ask him to allow you a few hundreds a year. And if you did not do this, what would be the value of your position as a poor officer? Who would give his daughter to a subaltern living on his pay?"

"Well, Mr. Truelove, I must do the best I can for myself, I suppose. I shall try and retrieve my past errors by future good conduct."

"That is easily said, young sir," he answered, shaking his head. "Good conduct at your age is to do as your parents wish. To live as you are doing is all pride—senseless pride—nothing better."

Nevertheless, though Mr. Truelove's words implied that he had as poor an opinion of me as ever, his manner towards me insensibly changed from that moment, and he now invited me to remain in town with him till my furlough expired. But this was contrary to my own wish, for I found him a bore, and so pleaded that I should like to get back to my duty. I was not unmindful of the poor "moper's" dying request that I should attend his funeral, and was afraid I should miss it if I remained in London a couple of days longer.

Mr. Truelove did not press his invitation, but folded the paper with the advertisement, and asked what directions he should give about the answers in case he decided upon having it inserted. I said he had better go to an advertising agency, explain why the notice was going to be inserted, and ask that the answers might be forwarded to him at Sheerness. Perhaps he would do wisely, too, in letting the police at

Scotland Yard know of the course he had taken. He promised to think about the matter, but moaned that he should have a great many troublesome things to attend to that day. He must first of all call on his married daughter, to ascertain if she had seen her sister; and then he must go to his solicitor in New Square. "I shall have to ask Messrs. Deedes and Blewbagge, my lawyers, whether I cannot compel that Mrs. Winkley of yours to pay my bankers the seven hundred and fifty pounds."

Now, here was another coincidence. Messrs. Deedes and Blewbagge had chambers in the same house as Mr. Pounceforth Blewbagge, the barrister in whose chambers I had been reading some months back, and who was a brother of the solicitor Blewbagge. I had half a mind to pray Mr. Truelove not to mention my name before his lawyers, but refrained on reflecting that from sheer contrariness he would infallibly do that which he had been requested to leave undone. So I rose to depart.

"Stop a moment; I must give you money for your railway ticket," said Mr. Truelove. He was examining the bill which the waiter had brought, and perceiving that my breakfast was not marked on it inquired the cause. "Pride, pride," he grumbled, when I had told him of having breakfasted out of the hotel. "Too proud to accept a breakfast, eh? Well, you must take this sovereign, for I promised Colonel Spilman to pay your expenses. Good day, now;" and he shook hands with me.

I quickly scampered out of the hotel, lest, altering his mind, he should recall me; and a quarter of an hour later I alighted from a hansom at Mrs. Winkley's door.

The lank-haired Prugmann was weighing tobacco behind the counter, Laura was serving a young man with cigars, and the shop had that air of brightness and order which is inseparable from good management by a person of taste.

For Mrs. Winkley had more prudence in ruling her shop than her heart.

She despatched her customer and joined me in the parlour, saying, with a rueful face, that she wanted my advice as to whether she ought to pay Mr. Truelove's bankers the full amount of the forged cheque; but her real motive was to excuse herself for the apparent fickleness with which she had transferred her affections from me to George Tudor. "You must think very badly of me, Harry," said she, like a school-girl at fault.

"No; why should I? We were all taken in by Tudor's plausible tongue—the scoundrel!"

"He wrote me such beautiful letters, Harry. I'll show them you if you like. Day after day he wrote to me, and always such nice things; no man ever put pen to paper as he did."

"He told you that you were charming, I suppose, and the best-hearted little woman into the bargain. He had not to draw much upon his imagination to find that out."

"Ah, you may laugh, Harry; but when a young woman is living all alone, letters like that make an impression on her. Such a gentleman as he is too in his talk. He always seemed to guess what was the thing you would best like to hear said, and said it. It was like opening your mouth and having a sweetmeat put in at every minute. I do believe if he were to come back now and say he was sorry, I would take him, such as he is, and try to make a better man of him."

"I hope you won't commit such folly as that, Laura," I remonstrated seriously. "You are not the only woman he has deceived." And I told her something of Tudor's entanglements with Miss Truelove, Rose Kurney, and Mrs. Plummidge.

She listened, but shook her head, wiping tears from her

eyes. "He only became acquainted with me after he had known those women. I can't believe I was quite indifferent to him, or that he is so bad as it appears. Why, the other evening, when we were together, he began to cry all of a sudden, I couldn't tell for what reason. Think what it would be for such a man to rest upon a woman who knew all his faults and could guard him against them."

"Well, Laura, it is a pity for both your sakes that his true character was not made known to you in time, so that you could save him."

"I think I could save him now, Harry, if I only knew where he was," she said, overcome by her feelings and sobbing. "If I can save him from trouble I would pay that money, though I can so ill afford it. Oh, he would be all the dearer to me if I felt that he had no other friend on earth but me."

This was the language of sincere affection—a thing different from Laura's passing caprice for me—and it could not without flippancy, or to any useful end, be scoffed at. One cannot put out a fire by spitting on it. Not caring to prolong a dissertation on George Tudor's psychological peculiarities, I ran upstairs to put on my uniform—my much-contemned uniform, which my countrymen of the middle class treated with little more respect than if it were a convict's garb.

When I came downstairs, Laura had got a little heap of bank-notes ready, and was instant in supplicating me to take the thirty pounds which she had given up. Of course, I flatly refused. She wanted then to force the money, or part of it, on me as a loan, which I also declined. "Well then, Harry," she said at last, "promise me that if at any time you are short of money, and want any sum I can lend you, you will let me know."

"I promise you, Laura, that if at any time you can

assist me in anything I will not fail to appeal to you as a friend."

"Well, but don't go yet," she said, trying to detain me; "you'll stop and have some dinner?"

"No, I must be off to Sheerness. Good-bye, now; and if you hear of Tudor and see him, tell him that honesty is the best policy, that his capture is *only a question of time*, and that he had better make restitution before worse happens. Don't forget that; and now good-bye again."

I ran out to the Victoria Station, but was just in time to see a train for Sheerness steam away. There would not be another for three hours. So nothing remained but to while away this time in a walk, and I bent my steps towards St. James's Park.

When there, what more natural than that I should push on a little further, to Westminster Bridge, and show myself to old Sergeant Parrot, from whom I had taken the shilling? Many recruits passed under the measuring tape of this worthy in the course of months, but it might be that he had not forgotten me, and would be happy to hear that I had got on well. He would be happy, at all events, to take a glass of "something 'ot."

Passing out of Birdcage Walk, I made towards King Street, and the old familiar sight was seen again. It was not so long, measuring by time, since I had been here, but so many things had happened in the mean while that I could almost fancy that I was revisiting a haunt of my boyhood. Here were the sergeants and pensioners, red, blue, or green, on the prowl for human prey; here the coy young men who had not quite made up their minds to enlist, but liked being blarneyed into it; here were the women selling fusees, and the sickly young men whom nobody would enlist and who wondered why, and the Hebrews on the look out for clothes or pawn-tickets to be bought; and here was Corporal Swip-

thorpe, just as when I had last seen him, his hair sweetly cockered up, his spurs clinking, his silver-headed riding-whip under his arm.

I nodded to him ; and he winked, not knowing me from Adam. As I held out my hand he grasped it. "How *are* you, my boy? Let's see, you're Brown, aren't you? No, blowed if I remember *who* you are!"

"Dickson—don't you recollect? I enlisted in September."

"Dickson? Ah, of course ; I knew it was some name like that. Ay, ay ! and you're a corporal already? I s'pose you've just stitched on them stripes for show?"

"No, no, indeed I haven't," I said, laughing ; "though they are barely twenty-four hours old. But I came to see Sergeant Parrot. Is he about to-day?"

"Pensioner Parrot, poor old boy, smoked his last pipe six weeks ago. You'll never more see him on this beat."

"Do you mean to say he is dead?"

"Ay, caught a cold and was dead in three days. Those old chaps can't stand drinking 'ot spirits and water all day long. They get to be all fat and no muscle, and the first time their health is out of order off they go. It's not the same thing as with us young uns," added the corporal, shaking his head sapiently.

I was naturally shocked to hear of this untimely termination to Sergeant Parrot's career ; although there was nothing in the news that could surprise one. There were plenty of other recruiting officers there who bore on their faces the red shadow of an impending fate such as his. Swipthorpe himself, though he boasted of his youth, had puffy cheeks, bloodshot eyes, and cracked lips. He could not have borne up against a serious illness ; if he had but cut his finger the wound would have festered for days, because of the mass of corrupt humours in him. He had

scarcely any appetite ; he lived on snacks and drams ; and so it was with most of his recruiting comrades, who are condemned to a life of professional boozing, under the walls of the very Parliament where laws are passed against drunkenness.


This evil, which kills the recruiting officer and contaminates the men whom he enlists, is an outcome of the lazy and hypocritical spirit so rife in our Parliament, where ugly facts are put out of sight so long as they can be covered with a flimsy principle. We object to make military service compulsory that we may save the principle of every Englishman being free ; but we have no objection to send out a number of recruiting officers with commissions to make young Englishmen drunk, and to wheedle them out of their liberty while they are not in a condition to reason on their acts. Thus we get an army composed in a large part of the scum of the population, and from which more than five thousand desertions take place annually. These facts are notorious. They can be verified, with many others as ugly, by any M.P. who will take the trouble to read military Blue-Books ; and that M.P. can further assure himself that for our army, such as it is, we are paying more than many continental states which can bring seven or eight times more men into the field than we.

Why do we not frankly recognize the principle that, a standing army being a necessity, it should be recruited in an honest, decent, and economical manner ? This could be done with a modified form of conscription, which would not press heavily on the nation. Let Parliament vote annually that so many men are required for the land and sea forces, and empower Government to raise them by drafts. Every man at the age of twenty should either draw at the conscription or pay exemption money. Those who objected to serve might insure themselves against the risk by paying,

say, twenty pounds before drawing ; but those who chose to run the hazards of the ballot-box, and then drew a "service number" from it, should be required to pay fifty pounds for their exemption. Out of these exemption payments a substantial fund could be formed for paying bounties to the poorer men who had been drafted, on the expiry of their terms of service, so that they might return into civil life, having lost nothing by their soldiering, but being rather gainers. Bounties should also be paid to men who would re-enlist on completing their terms of service, and also to men who enlisted voluntarily. The term of service should be six years for drafted men, and twelve years for volunteers, and from these last the Indian and colonial garrisons should be made up as far as possible. Under this system we might reduce the present rates of pay in the army without doing a wrong to the men, who would receive a good lump sum on their discharge ; and for fifteen millions sterling a year we could have an army of two hundred thousand men, thoroughly efficient, contented, and, morally speaking, far superior to that which we have at present. It would, moreover, be a truly national army, whose uniform would no longer be considered, as it too often is now, the badge of a man who has gone wrong.

How strong is the prejudice against soldiers in these days I was enabled to see before parting company with Swipthorpe, for after sauntering about and chatting with him for a time, I felt disposed for luncheon, and asked him to join me. He thought I meant to go to one of the military public-houses ; but it was not my fancy to eat ill-cooked meat in the company of roystering recruits, so I made a move towards a respectable restaurant in Parliament Street.

"Lor' bless you, they'll never serve us there," said Swipthorpe, when we had reached the door.



"Why not?"

"Oh, it ain't a place for soldiers. Come on to the Blue Posts."

"What nonsense!" I said, and walked in.

But scarcely had our two uniforms crossed the threshold, than a waiter barred our way, and said in a confidential tone, "We don't serve soldiers here; you'll find a capital house round the corner."

"Pray, why don't you serve soldiers?" I asked quietly.

"Well, our customers don't like it, sir," said the waiter, who now looked nervous. "I'm only obeying my orders, you know."

"You are bound by your licence to serve any sober person who comes to you for meat and drink," I answered as tranquilly as before. "Where is the landlord?"

"I'll call him," said the waiter, and whisked off.

This little scene had attracted the attention of some Government clerks lunching at the bar, and of others seated at the tables; wherefore the landlord, when he came, looked more nervous than his servant, and pretended that the whole thing was a mistake. We were conducted to a corner table at the further end of the room, and the waiter, red in the face and chastened in spirit, took my orders with something of exaggerated civility. But presently, when I had paid our bill and given him sixpence for himself, he entered into apologetical explanations. "My master wishes me to say, gentleman, that he hopes you'll take no offence. Of course, he knows that there are gentlemen in the army, and he'd always be happy to serve them. But you wouldn't believe what harm it would do to his business if soldiers came here often. Why, supposing some officers in plain clothes—and there are many who come here—found themselves obliged to dine next to soldiers, they would never return."

"Ay, ay, that's right enough," said Swipthorpe, jerking

his head at me. Swipthorpe had from the first been on the waiter's side. For his own part, he would have been happier at a pothouse, with a dirty tablecloth, a tin pepper-caster, and black-handled forks. There he could have unbuttoned his jacket and chaffed the serving-maid while eating; but the white cloth of the restaurant, its napkins, electro forks, and plated tankards, made him sit stiff, and obliged him to masticate his food gloomily. He was glad to get out, and cursed the place for having no comforts. He had not seen so much as a spittoon on the floor ! *

* Since the above was written, the Middlesex magistrates, at their Licensing Sessions (October, 1881), have taken the very proper course of licensing places of amusement only on the express condition that non-commissioned officers and soldiers in uniform shall be admitted to any seat they choose to pay for. General Brownrigg and Major Lyon deserve the thanks of the service for the spirited way in which they insisted on this stipulation, and required a written apology from the manager of a music hall who had refused to admit a colour-sergeant of the Guards into reserved seats, on the ground that he was in uniform.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TRUMPET-MAJOR.

ON my return to Sheerness I reported myself to Colonel Spilman at his private house, and gave him a narrative of my adventures, omitting nothing. I could see that he was preoccupied, and regretted having sent me with Mr. True-love. I had found out too much. There could be little doubt now that Tudor was truly the natural son of Lord Kirkport, and this circumstance might give rise to some disagreeable scandal, if the culprit should be caught. The colonel's manner was somewhat cold as he dismissed me. He did not request me to preserve silence about what I had ascertained, but it was easy to infer that he would not thank me if I should let my tongue wag.

He said nothing about his cricketing statistics, and as it was a Saturday, I concluded I might defer my private work with him till Monday. I went back to barracks and gave in my pass, rather glad to be once more at my work among men from whom I might claim respect.

But a change of duty awaited me. A soldier can never turn his back for four and twenty hours on a *dépôt* without being confronted with something new on his return. I was to be transferred from my barrack-room to the command of that which had formerly been under Sloop. It was the boys' room, the most plaguey in barracks; for its inmates

were all urchins of from twelve to sixteen, soldiers' sons, who acted as buglers, and some of whom were being trained as bandsmen. They were under the orders of the trumpet-major, and I, too, was now to pass under this non-commissioned officer's rule, though still belonging nominally to No. 2 Battery.

Sergeant-Major Harden, in telling me this, said that it was Sergeant-Major Burlow who had designated me for my new post, and that he intended it as a compliment. Burlow was not the man to soft-sawder a soldier, but once he had got his eye on him he tried to prove all the grit there was in his composition. His way of favouring was to give his pets difficult work to do, and the work of managing boys was most difficult.

"You couldn't have a better friend than Burlow," said Harden, "though he's mighty short in giving his orders sometimes, and would as soon think of giving you a kiss as a 'thank you' when you've executed them. However, he's a good sort; and, look here, he and I have both heard from the colonel that Sloopers berth was offered you, and that you asked to be left to your dooty. You couldn't have done better, and if you only keep steady, as you've been doing, you'll be a sergeant in a twelvemonth. Now, what about Tudor? You didn't find him, of course?"

"No; I left a description of him at Scotland Yard."

"That won't be of much use. The colonel needn't have sent you to London on such a foolish job as that. I s'pose he wanted to give you a 'oliday?"

"Probably that was it."

As the sergeant-major had heard nothing of the forgeries on Mr. Truelove, I forbore to enlighten him. He then told me to go and take my orders from the trumpet-major.

Trumpet-Major Drummond was leader of the depôt band, and a melcmaniac without much musical education.

He was a fairish flute-player, but he imagined himself to be endowed with a genius for composition, and composed marches which were made up of airs borrowed from other composers, though he seemed to be quite unaware of the fact. With these *pot-pourris* he worried the souls of his bandsmen, for he brought out a new one about once a fortnight, and no doubt he marvelled much that his talents had not yet raised him into renown. It should be mentioned that the passages by which the trumpet-major's borrowed tunes were connected with each other came from his own brain, and formed the wildest cacophony conceivable, being all loud brayings upon the biggest wind instruments. On the practised musical ear his marches must have produced the same effect as an ordinary person would derive from the sight of many richly coloured pieces of silk and satin stitched together with packing thread.

The trumpet-major was, of course, very touchy about his skill as a composer, and once he had appropriated an air from any opera, would fly into tantrums if any one suggested that this melody was not perfectly new. He was conceited, too, about his knowledge of musical terms, and discussed technical jargon with as much relish as certain art critics in newspapers; but in other respects he was not a bad fellow. He had a high arched forehead and deep blue eyes, but the top of his head was as flat as the under crust of a half-quartern loaf, and he had a short pug nose, so that Nature, having perhaps intended to create a genius out of him in the first instance, had apparently altered her mind as she gave him the finishing touch, and had left his head in a shape to puzzle the phrenologist and the student of physiognomy. Drummond was a teetotaller and a somewhat earnest religionist, who had abandoned the Presbyterian Church in which he had been bred because of the lack of music in its ritual. He was now a very high Anglican, and

was always vexing the chaplain to introduce a choir and Gregorian chants into the garrison church. Being possessed of a wife and family, the trumpet-major resided in the married men's quarters, and it was there that I sought him.

Married soldiers are indebted for many of the comforts they now enjoy to that humanest of all War Secretaries, Mr. Sydney Herbert. Before his time the wives of soldiers had such a rough time of it that it is a marvel how women could be found to marry into the army. How often have I heard old soldiers tell of the days when a married sergeant had to sleep in a corner of an ordinary barrack-room, with nothing but a screen to give him any privacy. In those times the sergeant's wife was the stewardess and general servant of the barrack-room. It was her only home, and she ruled there more or less despotically according to her temper. She cooked, scoured, scrubbed, washed her own things and the men's in the room itself, and sometimes hung them out to dry there. If any in the room fell sick she nursed them; and one of her charitable duties consisted in giving the back of a soldier who had been flogged a good rub down with salt. Very soldiers' wives indeed those women were—hard of hand and feature, too much used to coarse words to mind them, and in all the female instincts of domination she-sergeants with a vengeance. Some were ruled by their husbands; others bullied their lords. Some were gentle after a fashion; but others would bicker, nag, and quarrel with the women in the other rooms, so that there would be shrill war of tongues, with threatenings of mops and brooms, out upon the landings amid the soldiers, who laughed and jeered.

These were fine times, no doubt, to which soldiers like Bill Short (who only saw them in their decline though) might look back with satisfaction; but they are quite gone for the nonce, with many other things which Bill Short likewise

feigned to regret. Nowadays every bachelor sergeant has his private room ; and every soldier, whether non-commissioned officer or private, who is married with "indulgence" *—that is, with the colonel's leave—has cosy quarters in a building apart from the barracks. In most garrisons the building is on the same plan—a large edifice, with numberless stone staircases, and flats and balconies running all along the house outside each story, so that every suite of apartments may have its airing-place.

Trumpet-Major Drummond ranking with the brigade sergeant-major and the quartermaster-sergeant above all sergeant-majors, occupied one of the most eligible flats on the first floor. It consisted of a fair-sized sitting-room, a bedroom, a smaller bedroom, and a kitchen. There was gas in the sitting-room and kitchen, a plentiful supply of water, and a large iron coal-box, which was replenished every Saturday. Gas, coal, and water were all given free, and Mrs. Drummond drew daily rations of bread, meat, and potatoes, as well as her husband. She was a quiet, busy little woman of about five and thirty, who had been married twelve years, and had been conveyed to and from India with her husband in one of those magnificent new troopships which are the finest vessels afloat, but of which Mrs. Drummond always spoke as a "horrid place ;" for there appears to be no satisfying people who have all the comforts of life afforded to them gratis by the State. Mrs. Drummond did not take in washing as the wives of corporals and privates do ; for it is not customary for sergeants' wives to demean themselves thus, these ladies holding their heads a little higher than their humbler sisters. Besides, there was no pecuniary need for her doing so, as the trumpet-major's pay amounted to about nine shillings a day, and he must have

* Indulgence to marry is not generally given till a soldier has served seven years.

been well off if his wife was as prudent as her looks indicated.

The skreeling of a tortured flute guided me to the trumpet-major's door, and when I entered he was seated near the fire, with his jacket off, a copying sheet of music on his knees, a flute in his hands, and a pencil behind his ear. Mrs. Drummond was seated opposite him, mending a pair of little boy's trousers. Like a good wife she had long ago made up her mind that Jock Drummond was the greatest musical genius of the age, and let him play his flute without protest; he, on his side, never interfering with her domestic empire. Thus they were happy. The flute-playing did not disturb Mrs. Drummond, who doubtless was so habituated to it that she would have been obliged to collect her senses before answering with certainty whether her husband was tootling or not.

The trumpet-major received me affably, introduced me to his wife, and bade me be seated. Mrs. Drummond scarcely lifted her eyes, being shy and ungracious to strangers, like most Englishwomen of the lower orders. She woke up, however, and put in a word now and then when her husband gave me directions about my new duties; the sum of them being that the boys were a very pest, who must be kept in with a tight hand. "Slooper was not strict enough with them," said the trumpet-major, who spoke without any vulgarisms, and with but a faint Scotch accent, though he was of Highland descent. "Ye'll find out they are like raw colts, little better. My own boy, Willie, is among them, and as bad as the rest. He has learned to use such language as his mother wouldn't believe till she heard him."

"You must keep them from going into the men's barrack-rooms, corporal," interposed Mrs. Drummond. "They ain't allowed to go there, and they pick up nothing that's good by doing it."

"And if they misbehave themselves just report them to me, and I'll give them a bashing," continued the trumpet-major. "They're boys, and must be treated as such. They'll mind the bash (birch) when they mind nothing else, and the colonel always orders them a whipping when I complain."

"And you must mind they don't wear out their clothes too fast," chimed in Mrs. Drummond, in a querulous tone. "While Slooper had charge of 'em pretty nigh all Willie's pay used to go into the tailor's shop, which ain't reasonable."

She went on to say that her boy Willie got his clear eightpence a day, like a full-grown gunner, and she allowed him threepence a week pocket-money when he be'aved himself; but she was grievously afraid that he gambled with these funds, for she had caught him with as much as a shilling in his possession, which could not have been honestly come by. She hoped I would see to this, and mind that he was truthful, and changed his shoes instantly when he came in with wet feet. Whilst his wife thus discoursed, the trumpet-major, with the absent mindedness of true genius, had resumed his flute-playing in a minor key. When she paused he went on as though he had withdrawn himself into a seventh heaven of his own creating, and I listened. Glancing over his shoulder, he asked me amiably if I were fond of music.

"Very fond, indeed," was my answer.

"Like marches? I suppose you know I've composed a few of my own?"

"Yes, you are a very able composer; we're all proud of you."

His face brightened, and he moistened the key-hole of his flute with the tip of his tongue. "Listen to this: I am going to call it 'Colonel Spilman's March.'" *Tweet, tweet, toot, tweet.* He blew about twenty piercing notes, then played a bar of the "Marseillaise." "What do you think of that?"

"Very impressive."

"Quite original it is: it came into my head this morning. This is how it goes on." *Tweet, tweet, toot, tweet.* After a dozen more of these notes, he gave us the epithalamium from "Lohengrin;" two bars of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus;" another succession of *tweet-tweets*, and as a finale the break-down air from Offenbach's "Grande Duchesse."

"There, how do you think that sounds?"

"Grandly?"

"How do you like the transitions?"

"Very harmonious."

"Aren't they? As you like it I'll play it again." *Tweet tweet, toot, tweet.* "*Crescendo* here, for we have a blare of trumpets; but now"—*twee-it, too-it*—"andante for the flutes and hautboys. The last passage *con fuoco*, with the big drum and cymbals clashing in." *Twee-eet, twee-eet, too-oo-oo-toot toot.*

"There, I hope that's stirring enough."

He might have been playing to this hour, if Mrs. Drummond had not availed herself of his stopping for breath to remark that her boy Willie had got a boil on the back of his neck, and that the doctor had ordered him to poultice it at night, but he was always very careless about doing as he was told. She also relied on me to check him in a bad habit he had contracted of bolting his food; so that "he ate up his victuals faster than a grown man, and would certainly choke 'isself some day if he didn't mind."

Mrs. Drummond's exhortations to me to act the part of a faithful nursemaid did not serve to put my new duties in a very attractive light; and by and by, when I had got Bill Short's assistance to remove my chest from my old barrack-room, I repaired to my new quarters feeling much as though a practical joke had been played on me.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SOLDIER'S FUNERAL.

THE boys did not appear at first sight 'so black as they had been painted. There were some jolly little fellows among them; and all, as is natural with boys, put on their best behaviours to ingratiate themselves with their new superior. They were sorry to see Slooper go, because his rule had been an easy one; but hardly was the poor fellow's back turned before they began to commune with one another touching the smart cane whackings with which he had occasionally tempered the mildness of his government. They remarked with gratification that I brought no cane among my *impedimenta*; but the joy was short lived, for Slooper, presently returning with his own cane, for which he had no use, handed it over to me, saying I should want it. "You can't manage these young rascals without it," he said. "If they kick up a shindy after 'Lights out,' just call out 'Spats.' When I had called out 'Spats' once, they knew what to expect if they didn't hold their tongues."

I should mention that the court-martial sentence on Slooper not having been yet published, he was a prisoner, but, being a "non-com," was treated as a prisoner at large. He had to remain all day in a barrack-room, except during one hour when he might take exercise under the escort of a brother corporal; and he might not leave his room without such escort. With military philosophy he tried to put a

good face upon his disgrace, but it was easy to see that he was very crestfallen about it.

Slooper had told me that I had better take as my servant a boy of fourteen named Doggarty, who was the handiest of the lot, and wanted most looking after as a mischief-maker. Doggarty accordingly succeeded to Bill Short's office, and did his work well enough; but from this time I began to furbish my arms and accoutrements myself, not liking to entrust such work to a boy. Doggarty merely had to brush my boots and clothes, for which I gave him sixpence a week, thereby effecting a little economy of a shilling.

Doggarty was not only the ringleader in all mischief, but the bully of the room, kicking and cuffing the smaller boys to make them serve him, a practice to which I quickly put a stop. Most of these boys were fatherless, but had mothers who were washerwomen. They wore exactly the same uniform as the gunners, but with a bugle in yellow cloth on the left arm as a distinctive badge. Saucy, brazen-faced little wretches, as full of tricks as monkeys, they used language which it staggered one to hear; but they also had their qualities, and, taking them all round, were more hopeful subjects than the majority of fatherless boys who run about the streets of towns, a plague and often a shame to weak mothers. They drilled wondrous well; they were smart and clean, obedient to orders firmly given, and had a proper pride in their uniform. Not one of them would have "taken a licking from a *lout*" (*i.e.* a civilian boy) whose face he could have reached with his fist; and their behaviour when out in the streets was, with rare exceptions, very good.

Each of them had a copper bugle suspended above his cot by a blue-and-white cord, and three of them were on duty every day—one as general bugler in barracks, the other two as buglers of the guard at the two guard houses. There

were twenty of them in the room, and they acted as "cooks" by couples turn about, for the work of cook would have been too heavy for one boy to perform alone. On days when they were not on special duty they had two or three hours in school, and two spells of drill, besides occasional musical instruction. Those of them who were going to become bandsmen practised in the band-room every morning. They were not called "buglers" by the men, but "fiddlers," and they described their bugles as fiddles. They would have laughed the correct term to scorn.

It was a curious thing to me, the first time I sat down to breakfast with this tableful of urchins, to feel myself like a school usher at the head of a class of turbulent boys who said d—n to one another on the slightest provocation. I was, in truth, but ill fitted by my age and character to have charge of boys, but I had not spent a day among these before I reasoned with myself that for their own sakes it was my duty to keep a conscientious watch over them. They did not render my task too difficult either, for I had come among them with considerable prestige, owing to my rapid advancement, my exploit with the general's waggonette, and my victory over McRonagh and the Irishmen in the other room. A rumour had already got about that I was in favour with the authorities and should quickly get a commission, and therefore these youngsters kept quite as sharp an eye on me and my manners as I did upon theirs. Having a horror of foul language, and knowing boys to be imitative, I thought I should best commence to cure them of their filthy habits of speech by never addressing any of them in angry tones. I wished to break them of their bad habit altogether, and not merely to awe them into speaking decently before me, if they were to indulge in their profanities behind my back, and a good example appeared most likely to compass this end. I cannot say that my plan

wrought much good at first; for Doggarty took into his head that, being soft of tongue, I must be soft in other respects. But he was cautious in acting upon this belief, and for several days the boys gave me no sort of trouble.

In this interval I heard nothing of Mr. Truelove, but received notes both from Mrs. Plummidge and Rose Kurney, who besought me to call upon them. I waited upon the "Cable" first, and found her in a mood like March, showers of tears alternating with furious gusts:—

"*Illa vere dolet quæ sine teste dolet.*"

This middle-aged grass widow had not the same resource as her younger rival, Rose, who could call upon matrons and maids to sympathize with her in her bereavement. Had Mrs. Plummidge gone and shrieked her woes into the ears of her neighbours, she would have been laughed at from one end of the Blue Town to the other. As it was, her ugly niece seemed to relish her discomfiture with a demure air of propriety, and the shop-boy had been found giggling as if he would split his sides in stray nooks and corners. Mrs. Plummidge had to endure all this. She must put her tears in a bottle; but her affliction was terrific, and as she gave vent to it at last in my presence, the expression of it rose to the highest order of eloquence. "Twelve new shirts with the best linen fronts and cuffs made stiff as cardboard, Mr. Dickson—that's what I gave him as a Christmas box; for he was so partickler about his linen being nice. Likewise twelve cambric pocket-handkerchiefs with broad hems, and six of the beautifullest suits of under merino vests and drawers you ever clapped eyes on. The Prince of Wales couldn't have wished for a finer outfit than I sent after that vagabone to Victorey Station, along with three brand-new pairs of gloves, seven and a arf, double stitched, which I charge four and sixpence for in the shop."

"Well, Mrs. Plummidge, you are, at all events, well rid of him," I observed, evincing a proper degree of emotion. "He might have robbed you to a much greater extent had he become your assistant."

We were quite alone, for it was on Sunday night, and the ugly niece had gone to church. Mrs. Plummidge wrung her hands, and big tears coursed each other down her red-hot cheeks in piteous chase. "I don't call it being well rid of a man, Mr. Dickson, when he walks off with a parcel of goods such as that and eighty pounds of one's money; not to mention a lot of other cash—a pound here, a pound there, which I gave him at different times." The grass widow's voice suddenly rose now and raged like a tempest. "He's the wickedest, lyingest rascal that ever walked, and all sojers is alike. Why didn't *you* warn me against him? *You* must have known his artful tricks very well. Don't tell me you didn't; it's all a pretence, for you sojers stand by each other like fingers of the same hand. I shouldn't wonder if you'd had your share of my money."

"Come, are you talking seriously?" I asked, highly indignant. "What do you mean by accusing me of robbing you?"

"Oh, big words don't frighten me," she retorted. "Maybe if the police questioned you, you wouldn't be so saucy."

"Will you come with me to the police station, Mrs. Plummidge?" I said, rising from my chair. "You may not have heard that Tudor robbed me as largely as he robbed you, and as you appear to be the last person who saw him at Sheerness your testimony might be of value. Why haven't you lodged a complaint against him?"

"Because I don't choose."

"Because you don't choose that the trustees of your lunatic husband's estate should call you to account for the

money which you gave to Tudor. I suppose that is what you really mean?"

She coloured violently at this, her eyes flamed, and she brought down her fist with a thump on the table, declaring that she was a free woman. But I gave her another shock by hinting that if Tudor were caught she would certainly be put into the witness-box, and would be at liberty then to state how she had sought to purchase a handsome assistant, half her own age, for eighty pounds, and had been fooled in her bargain. I hit her more hard than was manly, and she gasped; but considerate words would have had no more effect on a woman of her stamp than pellets on a rhinoceros' hide. When I had spoken I marched out of the room, and when I was halfway across the shop she howled after me, beseeching me to return, as she didn't mean what she had said. But I had had enough of her, and left the shop, slamming the door rather rudely.

Rose Kurney could bear her grief with more dignity than Mrs. Plummidge. The first anguish of it was now past, for she had been comforted by neighbours and had been made to feel that she was interesting. It was not suspected that George Tudor had seduced her, and she had to cloak her feelings a little so that the suspicions of her kind friends should not run on this tack. Her father looked more woe-begone and humiliated than she. Standing behind his pewter counter, with his battery of brass-hooped barrels behind him, he served his customers in silence. His nod to me was cold. He did not by a word imply that he regarded me as Tudor's accomplice; but, what was worse, his looks betokened that he thought so, and I am sure that he had privately told his daughter that he believed as much. She, therefore, had sent for me that she might closely study my eyes, and try to make out whether I knew more as to the fugitive's whereabouts than I chose to tell. The girl was

too conceited to acknowledge to herself that Tudor had plied her with gross flatteries without caring for her a rush ; it suited her much better to suspect that he had been lured from her by a designing caitiff, and that this caitiff was I.

However, she could make nothing of me. I was still smarting from my encounter with Mrs. Plummidge, and the first time she stared at me inquisitorially, I paid her back with such a fixed gaze of my own, that she lowered her eyes, blushing crimson, and betrayed great distress. I more than half guessed her secret, but said nothing to show it. After a few trivial remarks, she told me that there was no lack of real gentlemen—ay, and even officers—who would be glad to marry her, and that she was not going to break her heart because one to whom she had been so kind (she could not bring herself to call Tudor by any hard name) had run away with her money ; but she wanted me, if I heard privately from Tudor——

Here I interrupted her. “My dear Miss Kurney, if I hear from Tudor at all it will be to put him in the hands of the police. He knows that well enough not to correspond with me.”

“Still, you were his friend, you know——”

“I am his friend no longer.”

“But you wouldn’t help to catch him and put him in prison?”

“Indeed I would ; and I hope I shall get him lodged there before long.”

She said nothing more after that, and was either rid of her prejudice against me, or, which was more likely, decided that I was too sharp for her, and too combative at the same time to be attacked safely.

It was very hard to feel myself thus suspected, considering how easily I might have exculpated myself by re-


vealing the true story of Tudor's desertion and the trap I had set to catch him. But this was not my secret to tell; and as nothing of Tudor's adventures with Miss Truelove had transpired in the town, notwithstanding that Mr. Truelove's servants were aware of them, it was evident that secrecy had been very strictly enjoined. That Colonel Spilman wished to hush up the affair so far as he could was shown by the fact that, although he now knew the "moper" to have been a pickpocket, he did not countermand the military honours for his funeral.

Accordingly, Gerard Gay was buried on the Monday afternoon, at the same time as the gunner who had been killed drunk and fighting on Christmas Day. I asked to attend the funeral, and was sent as corporal of the battery which furnished the escort.

The procession was formed in the road leading to the hospital, in fine mild weather, a soft wintry sunlight touching with its rays all the actors in what is always a most solemn scene. The two coffins were set on gun carriages, each drawn by four greys, the steel mountings of whose brown harness gleamed like silver. On each coffin was spread a Union Jack, upon which were laid articles of the deceased's uniform. Upon Gerard Gay's there was only a forage-cap, for he had never worn full uniform; but on the other man's was a busby and tunic.

The band marched in front of the gun carriages; behind them came a firing-party of twelve soldiers, with arms reversed; to the rear of these, fifty men in full uniform and with side-arms, but no carbines. Major Dandimont and a lieutenant were in command of the detachment.

It was a great array for two humble soldiers—and such soldiers! The flag of their country to serve them as a pall; music plaintively filling the air as they went; and a long concourse of soldiers stepping behind them in a slow march.



As the procession filed into the street the band struck up the Dead March in "Saul," and all the tradespeople flocked to their shop doors. A military funeral is of all others a stirring sight. The music profoundly moves the women, especially those who are educated and can think upon its significance ; the Union Jack moves the men ; the children stare at the uniforms and horses. As the carriages wend their way along, soldiers walking in the street stop and salute ; officers in plain clothes lift their hats ; a party of marines halt, face, and present arms.

When we arrived at the cemetery the chaplain, in his surplice, was waiting. The coffins, removed from the carriages, were borne on the shoulders of sixteen men, eight to each, to two graves dug side by side, and all the men clustered round as they pleased, with their heads bared. Only the firing party were drawn up in a line near the graves, watching for the order to discharge their volleys.

The funeral service began ; and at the words, "We commit their bodies to the ground ; earth to earth, ashes to ashes," the order to fire was given ; and three times, firing all together, the men discharged their carbines towards the clouds. The air was filled with smoke, the birds fluttered away frightened from surrounding trees, and then all was still again while the chaplain finished the service. Some of the soldiers—not many—were strangely moved. One young man, who did not know either of the dead, but some chord in whose heart had been struck either by what he heard or what he saw, leaned against a tombstone and sobbed. Old soldiers, who are callous to all else, often say that a funeral unnerves them for the day.

Such were the obsequies of Gerard Gay, performed with all the pomp the thought of which had cheered him in his dying days. Friendless, he was buried amidst a greater concourse of mourners than many men who have troops

of friends ; honourless, he was interred with every mark of honour.

“After all, it’s something to be a soldier,” remarked a young recruit, as we marched back to barracks to the tune of a popular medley.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WORK, GUN DRILL, AND DISCIPLINE FOR BOYS.

WHEN I had returned from the funeral I got a message from the colonel, saying I was not to go to his house that (Monday) night, but to go on the morrow. On the Tuesday morning I read the advertisement which had been composed for Tudor's benefit in the principal newspapers, and in the evening I made my appearance at the colonel's house.

He said nothing about Tudor or Mr. Truelove at first, but asked me if I had had tea. On my answering in the affirmative, he told me that he would have tea provided for me in future, so that I could come at six and remain till half-past eight four nights a week as originally agreed. He then set me my work, which was to revise a number of batting and bowling averages which he had reckoned. I now learned that my gallant commander was engaged in writing a book called "Memoirs of a Bat," and with the modesty of an author he showed me a heap of manuscript which he said wanted revising. I also learned that, after the manner of most enthusiasts, in whatever calling or crotchet, he was anxious to make his statistics tally with his theories rather than his theories with his statistics. . Thus he had established it as a postulate that the highest batting averages in the army were made by cavalry officers; the best bowling ditto by officers of the scientific corps; whilst


infantry officers were the expertest fielders. He favoured the opinion, however, that Artillery officers were the best players "all round;" and he was desirous that his statistics should bring out these truths. "Perhaps the figures will require a little coaxing," he said naively, and so went off to dinner.

Being quick at figures I soon got through my work; so that when he returned from his dining-room he was pleased with my progress, and said that next day he would ask me to look through about a hundred cards, and note any peculiarities or coincidences I might detect—as, for instance, when the same batsman had succumbed several times to the same bowler on different grounds. It was not till then that the colonel said anything about Tudor, and his words, as well as his friendly manner, showed how well advised I had been in keeping my tongue with a bridle.

"I have heard nothing more from Mr. Truelove," he remarked, "except that his daughter is safe with her sister in London. It is, of course, a very painful matter, and I am glad that you have not let it become a matter of barrack-room gossip."

This was all he said, and it was clear that he had taken means to ascertain whether I had apprised my sergeant-major of the object of my journey to London. It was equally plain that a thoughtless word would have grievously damaged me in his opinion.

On the following night the colonel was not in his study when I came, but a neat housemaid soon entered with a tea-tray very prettily spread. There was a cloth on it, some excellent tea, two rounds of buttered toast, a cottage loaf and some butter, and a plateful of ham. These dainties were set on a little table near the fire; and the maid, addressing me very civilly as "Corporal," requested that I would ring if I wanted any more water.



All this was very nice. Seated in a good armchair beside a fire, and sipping strong tea, was a much more agreeable way of spending a winter evening than loitering about the recreation-rooms. It was the more so as I felt interested in the work set me, and meant to spare no pains in making it satisfactory. By the time the colonel came in from dinner I had prepared him a goodly number of "coincidences," not too far fetched, and which he pronounced admirable. He was particularly gratified at discovering that I not only knew the names of all the leading cricketers, but was conversant with their several styles of play, though he was too much of a gentleman to inquire where and how I had picked up my experiences. My knowledge was useful to himself, for it was greater than his own as regards the younger generation of cricketers. He avowed that he had suffered dread things in the previous season through the bowling of one Mr. Twistleton of Cambridge, who had inflicted on him the ignominy of two *exits* with duck's-eggs. I made bold to inform him that the terrible Twistleton was only fatal in his early overs, when, if on the spot, he would sometimes take two or three wickets in a dozen balls; but that he quickly tired, and losing heart as soon as his precision failed him, he delivered long hops which could be punished to one's heart's content. The colonel would not quite admit this proposition, for he remembered that Twistleton had once disposed of him in a fortieth over; but he refuted my saying as gravely as if I had propounded some newly acquired fact about the trajectory of chilled shot. And I think he pondered long and seriously over my communication when I was gone.

Writing about cricket did not make me neglect the garrison cricket-ground. Every day I went to assure myself that the wind or the deuce had not carried it off, and in odd half hours I took fatigue parties there to clear up the rubbish that

might be defiling its sward. Stray bits of paper had an affinity towards the place, sacrilegious hands threw orange-peel upon it, and the wind sometimes littered it with straw blown from the stables where the horses of the field brigade were stalled. The colonel always walked to the ground when he came to barracks, and he was never so happy as when he could espy half a dozen unfortunate soldiers bending their backs to pick up the rubbish and stack it in baskets. One day, coming on to the ground alone, he surprised some boys of the town in the very act of throwing stones—big, jagged flints, too—across the sacred turf for their amusement. His indignation was so great, that he chased the miscreants round the field with his umbrella, and hallooed to the sentry in the Hospital Road to stop them. Had not the little wretches made good play with their heels the consequences must have been terrible.

What between my work for the colonel and my duties towards the boys, I now had my hands pretty well employed; and it was just at this time that my gun drill became most fatiguing. I was exercised every day in taking field-pieces off their carriages, trundling wheels (slightly convex on one side) across the parade-ground, and other such little sports. The work was hard and dirty; one had to do it in old jackets, and it made the perspiration stream. Our instructor was a specially prim sergeant, who was all agog for smartness and coolness, even when we were doing the work of horses. Dividing us into two batteries of twelve each, he would set us racing at which could mount its piece quickest, and convey it a hundred yards off, where it had to be dragged up a slope to the ramparts. The two pieces given us to operate upon were always dismounted, as if the carriage had been struck by a shell from the enemy. The wheels were lying here and there. One afternoon I came a lovely cropper, for, the rival piece having got under way a little

ahead of ours, the men of my party put on the off wheel without fixing the lynch-pin. I was one of the four men seated on the gun-carriage ; but halfway across the parade, while the eight drawers were racing hard to catch up the first team, the wheel rolled off, and all four of us were tumbled over, like so many potatoes out of a sack, to the boundless amusement of all the drill squads.

These exhausting movements, at the end of which one had to take a thorough wash and change clothes, made me look upon my four evenings a week at the colonel's as a pleasing relaxation. It was known in barracks that the colonel was employing me as his secretary, and I was much questioned as to what work I did for him ; but, having learned a lesson in reticence, I answered no more than that I wrote what things I was ordered to write. I said nothing about the teas, nor about the colonel's familiar conversations with me, and thus made no man envious, nor incurred the imputation of giving myself airs, as might have been the case if I had told the whole truth, even had I given myself no airs at all.

Perhaps if my boy Doggarty had known that Colonel Spilman regaled me on buttered toast, I should have risen so many cubits in his estimation that he would have been afraid to play tricks on me ; but since I had been put in charge of the boys' room, the soul of this young "fiddler" had been tormented with the desire of discovering "what kind of stuff" I was made of. One night, when I had lingered later than usual at the colonel's (for he talked about his matches as some do of their campaigns, and had entertained me with a soul-stirring account of how he had once defended his wickets for eight hours against the craftiest bowlers in England, and had carried out his bat for three figures)—one night, then, when I was tired and sleepy, Doggarty, who had smuggled two rats into the room, let them loose on my bed.

I used not to allow the boys to talk after "lights out," but on this occasion, as soon as the gas was extinguished, I heard some smothered giggles under bed-clothes. The rats quickly jumped off my cot; whereupon Doggarty, who could not possibly have known what they were unless he had introduced them himself, for it was pitch dark, raised a hulla-balloo of "rat," and tumbled out of bed for an exciting hunt. Some of the other imps, who were privy to his game, joined in the shouting, and cossacks (shoes) began to fly about the room in every direction; for there was every cause to throw shoes while two rats were abroad, though not much reason for hurling so many in the air in the direction of my cot, where they were likely to hit me on the head.

Without saying a word, I arose, struck a match, and as it flickered I had just time to see Doggarty fling a boot straight towards my cot. I lit the gas, and ordered the door to be opened, when the rats darted out like lightning and were down the stairs in no time. Having then dressed myself, I told Doggarty to put on his clothes and come down to the guard-room.

"Guard-room, corporal! What for?" he asked in a tone of injured innocence. He was a crop-headed, round-faced, gooseberry-eyed boy, who could look awfully innocent when he pleased.

"For bringing those rats into the room. Come, no words about it. Look sharp!"

"But, corporal, I'll take my dying oath I didn't bring 'em. Really I didn't; you may ask any of these chaps."

"Do as you're told, or I'll have you carried down without your clothes."

A walk down to the main guard-house on a winter night is never pleasant, and Doggarty hoped that by much talking and whining he might induce me, for my own sake, to push the affair no further. Corporal Slooper, in such a case,

would not have exposed himself to the night air, but would have distributed "spats" all round. That is to say, he would have gone from cot to cot, pulled down the bed-clothes, and have given each boy *quantum suff.* of caning. The boys always protested against these "spats" as illegal, and many a time, as they yelled and writhed under the wheals, they had sworn to put in crimes against Slooper for hitting them ; but on the whole they preferred the informal correction of "spats" to the more lawful visitation of the trumpet-major's birch. So when Doggarty saw that I was in earnest, he did as sturdy vagabonds do when they want the magistrates not to commit them for trial, and he begged me to dispose of his case summarily.

"You acknowledge, then, that you did bring in the rats?" I asked.

"Please, corporal, it was only for a lark," he muttered.

"And yet you took your dying oath that you didn't!"

Doggarty did not seem to have much comprehension of what a dying oath was ; but I chucked into his arms the things he had not put on, and shoved him out of the room by the shoulder. Ten minutes later, I had lodged him in the guard-room, and next day, at noon, he was sentenced for his insubordination, aggravated by profane lying, to receive a good whipping of twelve strokes with a birch.

This sentence was not executed forthwith, but hung *in terrorem* over the culprit for several days, and made him an altered creature. It is all nonsense to talk of the hardening effect of the rod ; the intense dread of it softened Doggarty beyond conception. He had no spirit for larks now. When he beheld the trumpet-major from afar, he shivered in his shoes. Every morning, towards breakfast time, his face turned to turnip colour, and he glanced with affright at the door every time anybody entered. If my look perchance met his, his eyes filled with tears, and there would

be a mute supplication in them that I might yet intercede for him, which I would not have done on any account. Sunday came, and Doggarty had peace, knowing that his cuticle could not be molested on this day; but towards evening his spirits sank, for Monday—Black Monday as it was called—used to be the customary “feast of triangles” in the old flogging days, and Trumpet-Major Drummond was a pious respecter of ancient traditions. It was, in effect, on Monday morning, just before breakfast, that this eminent composer marched into our room, carrying under his arm a music-bag, containing—not, alas! a recreative flute—but the implement of correction.

It was a splendid, awful birch, large, but not too large; it was a birch strongly tied at the handle, and spreading halfway up into a noble bush, with twigs all new and supple, and laden with buds. The trumpet-major, though prone by his musical genius to gentle sentiments, was a strict disciplinarian; nay, he possibly recognized a melody *sui generis* in the screams of a bad boy being justly chastised for his offences. To the musical, all sounds have their harmony. “Now then, Doggarty, my lad, you know what I want you for,” he said briskly. “Make yourself ready; and you, Brown, James, White, and Jones, come and hold him down.”

The pluck of Doggarty was in the crucible now. He had never been birched before, but he had seen others birched, and had laughed at their wriggings. The time was come to show whether he was indeed the cock of the room, and could bear the rod better than others. The trumpet-major had taken off his jacket, and was turning up his sleeve with a business-like air. Poor Doggarty lowered his garments, stuck a piece of india-rubber between his teeth, and prostrated himself over a form, where, held tight by the shoulders and ankles, he was securely pinioned. All the

boys, terrified like young mice, held their breaths while the birch, swishing through the air, fell with a sound like the splash of a bucket of water on Doggart's person. The first four cuts he bore in silence, but at the fifth the piece of india-rubber escaped from his teeth, and he hallooed for mercy. Struggling, shrieking, sobbing, gasping, he continued to fill the room with his noise during the rest of his punishment; and when it was over he stood up and howled at large, stamping his feet, for several minutes. But from this time his comb was cut, and he ceased to be such a braggart or bully. Much greater order prevailed in the room than before, and he brought no more rats into it.

I availed myself of the wholesome terror excited by Doggart's punishment to issue a general prohibition against swearing and other bad language. I told the boys that they did not swear before officers, and could therefore quite well control their tongues before me and before each other. I also forbade their entering any of the men's barrack-rooms (except on duty), or smoking, or playing cards; and I warned them that the first boy who infringed the rules should get something to remember.

For a week or so every boy was on his best behaviour, but one afternoon, going into one of the barrack-rooms to send some men on picket, I found three of the young wretches breaking all my four rules at once, for they were in this room, smoking, gambling, and swearing in chorus over a disputed point in the game. I packed them off to their quarters, and there, in the presence of the others, gave them till bedtime to reflect whether they would rather be handed over to the trumpet-major's mercies or be caned by me. At bedtime they answered, like the little fish in the fable, that they would rather not be fried at all; but as this was begging the question, they had to make up their minds, and eventually chose "spats."

They got "spats" in consequence, but served in such plenty, and so hot, that the punishment left them all broken, panting, and amazed. Nor did any one of them ever swear again in my presence. I cannot add that they gave up going into the barrack-rooms, for the men used wantonly to encourage them to do it, and ought by rights to have been punished for this as sharply as the boys themselves. However that may be, I was compelled to wink at a practice which I was powerless to check unsupported. It would never have done for me to act as a spy upon the boys; indeed, if I had reason to suspect that some of them were in a room where they had no business to be, I would avoid entering it even if I had business there myself. Continual scoldings and punishments do no good; and I had to rest satisfied with having in a small way, so far as I was able, changed my troublesome charges for the better.

But meanwhile some events had occurred which I knew not, and which were shortly going to bring my stay in the army to an abrupt end. First, we got some tidings of Tudor.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE.

ABOUT a week after the advertisement for the "secretary to a nobleman" had appeared in the papers, I was summoned to Colonel Spilman's house in the middle of the day. Mr. Truelove was with him, and had a large bundle of answers he had received to his insertion. More than a hundred young gentlemen had written to say that they had been to school and college, could talk French, and were willing to go anywhere in the world with a nobleman.

Mr. Truelove had opened all these epistles, and he handed me one which I had no difficulty in recognizing as being from Tudor's hand. Just as I had expected, the scamp had made use of my name, putting himself completely in my shoes, and giving references to my old school tutor, and to two of my quondam college friends who had handles to their names. Tudor was evidently very anxious to secure the situation, and the letter was penned in an extremely pleasing style, so that had the advertisement been genuine it would have attracted notice amongst any number of others. He dated from Long's Hotel.

I could not help laughing at the cool impudence of the fellow, but neither the colonel nor Mr. Truelove joined in my merriment. "That was a very ingenious idea of yours, my young friend," said the latter seriously. "It shows you are an observer of character."

"I am glad the device has succeeded," I answered, feeling in truth very glad. "I suppose a reply will be sent at once?"

"The police were communicated with two hours ago by telegram," said the colonel, "and I dare say by this time Tudor is in their hands. Mr. Truelove is going to London by the next train."

The two gentlemen were silent for a moment, and appeared to hesitate as to what should be said next. There was evidently something to be added. At last the colonel coughed and said, "Of course, Dickson, you want to recover your watch and other property. But are you desirous, on other grounds, of prosecuting this man?"

"Not at all, sir," I answered, seeing his drift. "I would sooner, in fact, lose my money than appear in a prosecution which could only bring disgrace on the regiment."

"Well, I am pleased to hear you say that," replied the colonel, as if relieved. "You have not let anybody know of this advertisement?"

"I have not mentioned it to a soul, sir."


"And you have made no mention of Mr. Truelove's name?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you have exercised a proper discretion. Mr. Truelove, as you may well conceive, would rather pack this rogue about his business than be put to the worry of a prosecution. The chief point is that the plunder should be recovered."

"Tudor cannot have spent much of his money yet," observed Mr. Truelove to me. "But however little we may get back, you shall have your thirty pounds."

"I would rather Rose Kurney and Mrs. Plummidge were paid before me," I remarked; and I reminded the colonel of the losses of these two bereaved females.



Mr. Truelove made a note of their names, as though he had never heard of them before, which was mere affectation, for living in the same town he must have known them both pretty well, especially Mrs. Plummidge, of whom he bought his gloves and underclothing. After this the colonel said I should be informed of what was done with Tudor, and dismissed me. I was not asked to accompany Mr. Truelove to London. The whole business was apparently going to be managed *sub rosa*, with as few witnesses as possible.

I heard nothing more for two days, and meantime speculated as to how the colonel would get over the difficulty about Tudor's desertion. The civil prosecution might be dropped, but it would be difficult, if once the police got hold of Tudor, to overlook the fact that he was a deserter. However, I was not destined to learn more than the parties chiefly interested chose to tell me.

In two days I was again sent for to the colonel's. My watch and chain were lying on his table, with thirty pounds in notes ; and Mr. Truelove apprised me that he had got my luggage at his house. But now I was taken quite aback by the colonel gravely handing me a letter in a sealed envelope. It was directed to me by my real name, and in my father's writing !

"You had better read that at once,——," said the colonel, also calling me by my real name ; "for you may wish to speak to me about its contents."

I had changed colour several times, and must have looked uncommonly sheepish and guilty as I broke the envelope and read this, the two old gentlemen tranquilly surveying me all the time :—

"MY DEAR SON,

"I have heard through the lawyers, Deedes and Blewbagge, that you are a gunner in the Artillery at Sheer-

ness. I do not know why you should have concealed this fact so studiously from your mother and me, for our anxiety about you has been very great ; and you might have guessed that we should be happier to hear of your behaving yourself well as a private soldier, than of your continuing to lead the foolish life of debts and scrapes by which you afflicted us and ruined yourself before your enlistment. Whether you now continue to remain in the army must be a matter for your own choice ; but I have to inform you that your aunt Margaret died three weeks ago, leaving you property to the extent of twelve hundred pounds a year. You can obtain particulars of this legacy through our solicitors.

“Your mother and sisters send their love, and I am always

“Your affectionate father,

“—— ———,

“I send this letter through your colonel, whom I have made acquainted with your change of circumstances.”

There was a flush on my cheeks as I finished reading this letter, and I was more impressed by its kindness at first than struck by the tidings of sudden fortune which it communicated. I had to read it again before I quite understood it all, and even then I did not speak.

It was Mr. Truelove who broke the silence by saying he happened casually to mention my name before Mr. Blew-bagge, and that the latter had been eager to know whether I was the same young man who had been reading with his brother, for that a will had been made in my favour, and nobody could find out where I had gone. “I did not tell you that the other day,” he added, “for I thought the good news had better come to you through your own father. But you see now, Mr. ——, how dangerous it is for a young man to conceal his whereabouts from his family. That scamp

Tudor might have made such use of your name as would have got you into all sorts of trouble and disgrace."

"As the event proves, it is fortunate that Mr. Truelove did mention your name, for you might have remained in ignorance of your aunt's death for some time," said the colonel.

"Mr. Blewbagge thought of having you advertised for in the papers," said Mr. Truelove, "and then Tudor might have turned up to claim your windfall."

It is remarkable how a gentleman is revealed by his proprieties in little things. Mr. Truelove kept alluding to my change of circumstances as "good news," a "windfall," etc.; whereas the colonel, remembering that my fortune came through the loss of a relative, spoke merely of my "aunt's death."

However, it was patent that I no longer stood in the same pair of shoes as before, and Colonel Spilman asked me what were my intentions about the future.

"Really, sir, I can hardly say; all this is so sudden and unexpected."

"If you take my advice you will certainly leave the army," he said. "You can hardly, under the most favourable circumstances, get a commission before two years, and then you would find yourself junior to all other officers of your age. Besides, what sort of life would you lead in the interval? A rich non-commissioned officer is an anomaly."

"As much so as a rich footman," opined Mr. Truelove.

"Well, not quite that," said the colonel drily. "There is nothing menial in a non-commissioned officer's position."

"Pooh, pooh! A man who has to eat his dinner off a tin plate, and touch his cap to boys in their teens fresh from Woolwich," cried Mr. Truelove, plucking at his trousers.

The colonel looked vexed, but proceeded: "What I mean to say, Dickson, is, that unless you had the resolution

to put all your money on one side, and touch none of it until you were commissioned, you would be living differently to other non-commissioned officers, and either spoil yourself or spoil them."

"I will bear in mind what you say, sir," I replied respectfully.

"Of course, if you are bent on remaining in the army, it is no business of mine to dissuade you," continued the colonel.

"Pah! why can't you pack him off to his father?" exclaimed Mr. Truelove. "The idea of humouring a young gentleman in the foolish whim to black his own boots."

"You are not a soldier, Truelove," said the colonel, with a smile.

"Not I," retorted the pugnacious gentleman, unabashed. "Why, if a son of mine enlisted, I should think he had robbed me of all the capital I had spent in trying to make a rational man of him."

"I think our young corporal here is rational enough," expostulated the colonel kindly; and now he went on to say that if I decided upon remaining in the army he would do his best to get me advanced, and to that end would send me to India by the next draft. "I do not wish to put your position before you unfairly, mind. You will have a more powerful friend than I in Sir Rowland Horseley, who could get you promoted very quickly. But if you resolve upon applying for your discharge, I will see there is no delay in granting it you, and meanwhile you can have unlimited leave. You must in any case take a furlough to-morrow, to see your solicitor."

I bowed, for that is about the only form of answer possible to one's colonel, unless his words take the form of a question. It would have been impertinence to entertain my commanding officer with any doubts I might feel about

adopting advice which he was pleased to give me, and out of place to answer straight off that I would leave the army, as if I assumed that my discharge depended only on my good pleasure in applying for it. The colonel understood my silence, but Mr. Truelove thought I was pig-headed.

"Why, I do believe the boy has a mind to go out to India!" he ejaculated. "Troopship and salt junk all the way; men sick above, below, and around you. What a life for a man who is not obliged to it!"

"Let the corporal choose for himself," said the colonel, laughing. "But, ah! by the way, I forgot to tell you about this watch of yours, Dickson. You can wear it in barracks, and need give no other explanation than that it was restored to you through me, with your money."

"Very well, sir."

"You will be glad to learn also that Mr. Truelove's bankers have recovered their money."

"Every penny," assented that gentleman. "And the money due to those two females in the town has been paid too; so we may draw a line across this page of our ledger, and I trust for my part I may never hear that young rogue's name mentioned again. As for you, young sir, when you have cast those clothes off for good I shall be happy to see you to dinner at my table."

I forbore to put any question about Tudor's fate; and as nothing more was said after this delicate invitation, I departed.

How different everything seemed to me when I was again in the streets, and could muse over the startling alteration that had occurred in my prospects. The aunt who had left me her money had been little known to me, poor lady, and I could only feel for her loss in gratitude for the unlooked-for token of kindness she had bequeathed to me in dying. Twelve hundred a year was not a large fortune, but

it was a handsome independence, as I could feel now more truly than I should have done a few months before. As a soldier, I had formed new views about money—I understood its value better; and had acquired correcter ideas as to what constitutes the pleasures of life.

It was obvious that there would have been mere folly in my remaining in the army. It is one thing to be a soldier from necessity, and another to take up with the irksome routine of a soldier's duties from choice. I had no desire to go out to India; I was already pondering over far more seductive schemes of work and amusement in civilian life; and yet, when I had concluded to apply for my discharge, a sentimental fondness for the uniform crept over me, and I thought very kindly of the few friends I had already made in barracks—Harden, Forringer, Bill Short, and others—exaggerating their qualities a little, maybe, but reflecting that, on the whole, there were good fellows in barracks, despite a few black sheep.

On my way back I looked in at the Post Captain, ostensibly to take a glass of ale, but really to learn how and by whom old Kurney had been repaid the money, which he must have mourned for as dead and gone. He broached the subject himself before I had touched it. A gentleman—a stranger, he said—had come and paid him seventy-five pounds, asking him for a receipt, and saying he was sent by the family of Mr. Tudor, who was “off his head” at the time he borrowed it. “Have you got your money, too?” added old Kurney.

I nodded, and showed him my watch.

“Ah, well! that young man spoke the truth, I s’pose, when he said he had rich friends,” sighed old Kurney; “but he has hit my poor Rose precious hard,” and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards the parlour. “Since the girl has heard that he’s out of his mind she’s took

on terribly, and won't hear a word said against him. My opinion is she'd go off and nurse him now, if she only knew where he was to be got at."

I do not know whether Mrs. Plummidge would have been in such a hurry to run off and nurse the lover who had put her to such expense for linen, but I dare say she would. I paid her a passing visit, too, and found her very subdued, even awestruck, and compassionate. She told the same story of a gentleman having called on her with eighty pounds. She had asked him, just in the way of business, she said, whether he was prepared to pay for the linen and gloves too; but he had declined to enter into those particulars. "And I was so struck of a heap like, Mr. Dickson," continued she, wiping her eyes, "that I could hardly speak. Poor fellow! to think he should be ill like that! Well, I certainly did think there was something queer about him the last few days when he was here; and I was certain a gentleman such as he was couldn't steal money a-purpose."

"Well, Mrs. Plummidge, I hope you are satisfied now that I didn't have my share of the swag?"

"Lor', Mr. Dickson, you shouldn't mind what a poor woman says when she's nigh crazy. I naturally felt as bad as bad could be about—about that eighty pounds."

"I can understand that: it was a heavy loss."

"Oh, it wasn't so much for the money," responded the grass widow, tossing her head with *bourgeois* pride. "I pay my rent and taxes with anybody in Sheerness, thank goodness; but it was the way the money went. You miss a bale of linen that gets burned or damaged before your eyes less than a paper of buttons that's stolen off your counter by a friend; that's what I always say."

"Just so, Mrs. Plummidge. Well, we part as friends, do we not?"

"I'm never unfriendly to a soul, I 'ope, Mr. Dickson. Good-night."

But I'm pretty sure that Mrs. Plummidge put out her tongue at me behind my back as I went ; for, as a good writer has said, speech is composed of three parts, " words, tone, and looks," and neither the " Cable's " looks nor tone were friendly to me. How could they be ? She must have seen that I did not think her particularly well cast for the part of Ariadne mourning her fickle Theseus.

So the report was circulated in barracks that the brilliant Corporal Tudor had deserted the army because his senses had deserted *him*. The soldiers—a sceptical race—did not swallow this version at one gulp ; but as all the stolen money was refunded, they became convinced that he was a gentleman who had rich friends, and this rehabilitated him, for soldiers are not unforgiving. There was indeed a reaction in his favour. His many qualities, his good humour and talents, were again talked of ; and when his name was mentioned, the epithet of " blackguard " was no longer tacked to it like a kettle to the tail of a hunted dog. Soon a formal application for Tudor's discharge was made from some mysterious quarter ; the thirty pounds requisite were lodged, and he was removed from the roster, after having been transferred from the defaulters' roll to the list of men " on sick leave."

There ends all that I could ever learn of him. Laura Winkley, on whom I called in London, could not say what had become of him ; at Long's Hotel the porter told me that he had left " with two gentlemen in a cab." Mr. Truelove never could or would divulge a word to enlighten me.

I was fain to conclude that Tudor's relative, Lord Kirkport (who had been a wild character in his youth as Lord Inajiffey), had assisted him once more out of this scrape,

but had taken measures that he should not offend again, by having him put under restraint or by sending him over the seas. I have often wondered what kind of a scene took place when Tudor learned that he had fallen into a trap in answering the advertisement for a secretaryship, and whether he ever meditated over that wise saw of La Rochefoucauld's, which must have been known to him, and which could be commended to the reflection of all adventurers: "On peut être plus fin qu'un autre mais non plus fin que tous les autres."

Anyhow, the memory of George Tudor has remained impressed upon me as that of a man who offered a curious, almost pathetic, example of the effects of bad bringing up. He had a singularly gifted mind, which had been allowed to grow up without props, and had run all crooked. The taint on his birth had run through his blood vilely and miserably as a disease.

CHAPTER XXXI.

URGENT ARMY REFORMS.

I DID not leave the service so soon as the colonel had suggested that I might do ; for, having gone to London to see my deceased aunt's solicitors, I was informed that it would take a few weeks before all the matters concerning her will could be settled. The firm were obliging in their offers to advance whatever funds I might desire ; but I thought I might as well wait for my discharge in barracks, so as to complete my six months of service. I wrote to my parents (a more proper and dutiful letter, I think, than that which I had sent to my mother at Christmas) to make them acquainted with this resolve, and I stated—which was true—that I desired to learn as much more gun drill as possible whilst I was entitled to have the lessons gratis. The colonel made no objection to an arrangement which was to give him the benefit of my services as secretary for some weeks longer, but he insisted that there should be no delay in applying for my discharge. I need not apply to be temporarily liberated on furlough unless I pleased.

There was another man in barracks who went up for his discharge at the same time as I. He was a haircutter's assistant, who had had three thousand pounds left him, and was in agonies lest his application should be refused. We had to pass before a board of three officers, who were supposed to examine us, and gravely ponder whether we had

given cause sufficient for leaving the army. In my case this was a simple formality, for I was asked no questions ; but the board made up for their laxness towards me by excessive severity towards the haircutter. They talked of adjourning his application until the Indian draft had gone. A great many men would be wanted, and as the haircutter was efficient in his drills he would probably be taken for foreign service. If so, he must sail, but could apply to be discharged in India.

The haircutter almost swooned. It need not be said that in war time applications for discharges are not entertained, so that some of the old soldiers amused themselves at the haircutter's expense, by telling him that on landing at Calcutta he would certainly be sent to join in a little war that was then going on at the frontier, and that after this he would be kept under arms till the peace. There was just this much truth in these evil prognostications, that if the haircutter or I had been wanted to complete a draft we should have had to go (if we happened to be in barracks), even though we were expecting our discharge from day to day. However, in a few days the haircutter was ordered to lodge his money, and received six weeks' furlough. He made his exit from Sheerness with remarkable celerity, and I suspect that had he been wanted by his country his country would have experienced difficulty in getting at him.

This reminds me of a story I heard of a man who, having inherited some property, applied for his discharge just as the Ashantee war was breaking out. It was refused, and he was shipped off to Africa. On the passage out he committed a theft that he might be dismissed with ignominy from the service ; but the court-martial took a lenient view of his crime, and merely sentenced him to fifty lashes with the "cat." The luckless man caught a fever on landing in Africa, and died in hospital.

The Indian draft was now the general subject of conversation in barracks, and several desertions took place from dread of it. Most of the men who were wanted were recruits of only a few months' standing (though some were deserters from other corps), and this leads one to remark that if the present system of army recruiting is to be continued, it would be very desirable for the interests of the taxpayer that a central recruiting depôt should be established, where recruits of all arms should be sent for the first three or four months after their enlistment, before being posted to their respective corps.

There might be three of these depôts for the whole kingdom, Edinburgh, Dublin, and Woolwich, though a single one for England and Scotland might do better still. The saving effected by this measure would be great, and it would have some results still more important in ameliorating the tone and discipline of the army. It would render fraudulent re-enlistments almost impossible, for a man who had spent three months at the depôt would be pretty surely recognized by some one or other on the permanent staff of the place if he came there again ; or, at all events, the fear of being so recognized would be enough to keep him away. At present a man who deserts from Sheerness may take himself off to any other garrison town and enlist in a new corps. There are men who have served in half-a-dozen different regiments, remaining but a few months in each, and making away with the articles of their kits when they absconded. These desertions cost the country heavy sums in money directly, and they have a most demoralizing effect by propagating the notion that an offence which is so frequent is a venial one. A deserter who is apprehended gets only a hundred and sixty-eight days' imprisonment (six lunar months) for a first offence. Since flogging and branding have been abolished the deterrent penalty is not enough,

and that is reason the more why preventive measures should be taken.

I have known men desert simply because others did so. A bad character wants to go, and entices others to join him. He takes advantage of their being discontented through a stoppage of pay or some other temporary annoyance, and prevails upon them to be off with him for what he calls a spree. Away they start, lured often by the prospect of getting into a cavalry corps, where the uniform is smarter and the pay higher, and a few days later they put the country to the charge of supplying them with brand-new kits, to say nothing of the fees paid to the recruiting officers who re-enlisted them. Thus my old enemy McRonagh took it into his head to bolt, and easily persuaded his two countrymen, O'Rourke and Boyle, to accompany him. These three Irish made themselves scarce by the aid of forged passes a week before the draft was published in orders; and I am certain that when they had run through the money raised by the sale of their military effects, two of them re-enlisted. O'Rourke, with his usual bad luck, got re-taken and was sent to penal servitude, of which more hereafter. There are two other abuses which aid desertion, and which might be easily checked: forged passes and sale of soldiers' effects to old-clothes men. Blank forms of passes are sold at the canteens, three for a half-penny; and the soldier who wants leave or furlough fills up his pass himself, and hands it to his sergeant-major, who takes it to the office for a signature. But a soldier who writes a good hand can easily forge his captain's name to the blue strip of paper which is to serve him as a passport and enable him to travel in his uniform.

Why should not passes be issued straight from the office, out of a book with counterfoils and leaves of a particular pattern engraved? It would be impossible to forge

them then, and a soldier minded to desert could not leave his garrison town by train in uniform quite coolly, as he now often does. If, moreover, it were enacted that a soldier travelling in uniform in any part of the country should be required to exhibit his pass at the same time as his railway ticket to the guards and collectors (this is done abroad), a deserter could not go far unless he had got rid of his uniform.

But it would be very difficult for him to sell the effects of his kit, if the purchase of such articles from a soldier not discharged subjected the buyer to eighteen months' imprisonment for a first offence as a receiver of stolen goods. So long as a soldier remains in the army his effects are Government property, and he has no right to dispose of them; what is more, the man who buys them not only receives stolen property, but must be aware that he is abetting desertion. In all cases where a soldier wants to sell effects, the buyer should ask to see his discharge, and should examine whether the numbers on the effects tendered correspond with the regimental number of the soldier on his discharge sheet. Matters would be further simplified if Government would buy back from discharged soldiers such effects as had become theirs, or else would cause them to be supplied with certificated lists of such articles as they were entitled to sell.

As for the articles of superfluous clothing which a careful soldier might have to sell during his time of service, they should all be sold at the regular regimental auctions conducted by the provost-sergeants. There should be no sales of effects from hand to hand between soldiers.

To return, however, to the necessity for general recruiting dépôts. If we are to have an army composed of volunteers, it must be wished that we should be quite sure that all soldiers are voluntarily serving; but few men can

tell, until they have been in the army three months, whether they have any fitness for military life. Nor can their non-commissioned officers tell until after that time what is the nature of their aptitudes. Many cavalry recruits break down utterly in a few weeks, unable to bear the heavy strain of drills, stable-work, school, and gymnastic lessons which are laid upon them as soon as they join. Thereupon they desert or get laid up in hospital. Men subject to epilepsy, again, are constantly getting into the army, their infirmity being only detected after they have been posted to their corps, got free kits, and drawn pay, all of which is a clear loss to the State. These epileptics, when discharged as unfit from one corps, will go into another, keeping up this game for years. Thieves, burglars, incorrigible drunkards, even escaped lunatics, will fly into the army for refuge, and in nine cases out of ten either desert or have to be discharged, or are expelled from the service with disgrace after committing some new offence.

The establishment of a general recruiting *dépôt* would correct most of these costly evils. Bad characters would give the place a wide berth, from knowing how easily the police could supervise such an institution; drunkards, epileptics, men constitutionally weak, imbecile, or criminal, would be detected there while undergoing their probation, and could be rejected before they had cost the country much money or given it much trouble. Whilst at the *dépôt* a recruit should have no kit given him, but only the temporary use of such articles as he required; and he would wear a special uniform of cheap material, which, on being drafted by-and-by into a regiment, he could retain to use as a fatigue suit. He would not be discharged from *dépôt* as fit for service until he had passed through his marching drill and gone through an elementary course of gymnastic instruction. But if, after his three or four months' probation,

he felt a distaste for military life, he could be allowed to go, on refunding the cost of his keep and the pay he had drawn, with an extra payment of five pounds as a fine ; and if unable to pay five pounds in ready money, he might be permitted to give security for its subsequent payment by instalments. As to the pay of men in *depôt*, it should be a shilling a week for pocket money—no more ; * and the surplus to which a man was entitled should be reserved, to be paid him when he joined his corps. Thus, an Artilleryman who remained twelve weeks at *depôt*, and drew twelve shillings in that time, would have two pounds four shillings to receive when he became duly posted as a gunner : a sum which he would find very useful.

If persons conversant with military matters will consider these proposed reforms, they will see that the only objection that can be urged against them is that they might diminish the number of recruits. But if from the number of recruits who at present enlist be discounted the five thousand men who annually desert, it will be seen that the men whom the general *depôt* would scare away from the army are precisely those bad characters whom it is expedient to eliminate. On the other hand, if the scamps were weeded from the ranks, it is unquestionable that a great many more respectable recruits would join. So long as the army is pestered with rogues and deserters, so long will it have a bad name, and so long as it has a bad name steady young men will join it with reluctance. Let the army be purged and it would win character by means of which thousands would be attracted to it. Let it not be forgotten that deserters damage the army in three ways—by polluting it while they are in the ranks, by setting a bad example when they go, and by carrying false stories about its hardships among the

* A French infantry soldier gets a halfpenny a day ; a cavalry soldier, a penny.

working classes when they have gone. If the army were judged by the people according to the reports of its steady soldiers only, it would be more popular than it is. But one mendacious rascal may lie away the reports of a dozen honest men.

So, in a word, the prime measure of any beneficial army reform must be—Purification.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DRAFT FOR INDIA.

Two or three days before the draft, Bob Wilde, who was in cells for his Christmas Day fun, sent me a piteous message, begging I would exert influence to prevent his being drafted. He had heard of my promotion, and thought I might have some power with the clerks at the office. He was mistaken, and I sent to tell him so, at which his affliction must have been great, for it was impossible that he could desert now. He was caged like a bird, and if wanted for India would only be released on the morning of his departure, and would have to march straight down to the station.

It must not be supposed that all men were as opposed to the impending expatriation as he. A fair number had volunteered for India, and others were smilingly prepared for anything that might turn up, having ascertained from trustworthy sources how much better off a soldier is in India than in England.

My friend Forringer was making his preparations with hearty impatience to be off. The results of the examinations for school certificates having been published, I got my second class, and one morning, an order to that effect having come from Woolwich, Forringer and I were examined by two officers for a first class. I submitted to the examination, though I was going to leave, for I was anxious to know whether if I

had stayed I should have been able to qualify for a commission. The examination was terribly hard ; I had never at school or college undergone such a hard one ; but we both got through it. I was told of my success on the very day when my discharge came ; Forringer had his certificate sent after him to India.

The poor fellow rejoiced very sincerely at the legacy which had befallen me, and I did not allow him to leave England without giving him a token of my good wishes. Knowing how necessary it would be to him to have money if he got a commission, I pressed him to accept a cheque for one hundred pounds, advising him to keep the money in bank till the great day. He was much moved, and for a long while refused to receive the money ; but I assured him that he would pain me by refusing, for we had been comrades, and he ought not to stand on ceremony about taking a small sum which would prevent his either being straitened as to his outfit when he became an officer, or having to appeal to the generosity of his friends. An officer can live on his pay pretty comfortably in India if he have a good outfit to start with ; but if not, he must inevitably get into debt. With many thanks Forringer ended by accepting my present in the same spirit as I offered it ; and wringing my hand, he told me, with much feeling, that in many ways I had been his providential help, and that he should never cease to bless the day when I came into the army. He was especially encouraged now by my talking of his promotion as if it were a matter of course, and he promised me, smiling, that he would never sport the "hang-dog" look again.

To finish with Forringer, I may state that Sir Rowland Horseley actively befriended him. The circumstances under which he had been cashiered were re-investigated and considered, and he was advised frankly to reassume the name he had dropped. Six months after landing in India he was

promoted sergeant, in the following year he became a sergeant-major, and eighteen months after leaving England he got a commission in the Madras cavalry. Since then he has had various adventures, all of an honourable sort. He distinguished himself in the Afghan War, and got his captaincy with a staff appointment. When last I heard of him he was aide-de-camp to the commander-in-chief of one of the presidencies, and was about to marry. His luck had quite turned, for his relatives had taken him to their bosoms again, and an uncle had left him five hundred a year. He returned me the hundred pounds I had "lent" in a pleasing, manly letter, acknowledging how very useful the money had been to him, and adding that he had not touched a penny of it till he had got his commission.

As to the other ex-officer, Rivett, I got him, without much pressing, to accept ten pounds for having coached Forringer and me so assiduously for our examinations. He quite deserved the money, and I hoped he might in time compass his ambition of succeeding old Mr. Slocock in the school-mastership. But I am sorry to say he did not turn up trumps in the game of life. Uncured by the narrow escape he had had on Christmas Day, he got drunk once again, was reduced to the ranks, recovered his stripes once more by a long spell of good conduct, lost them again, and so on. He was at last killed in the Zulu War, being then a bombardier.

* * * * *

It was on a bitterly cold and dismal morning that the draft was read out in orders. The snow was falling in big flakes; all the roofs, the ramparts, the drill-grounds were covered with a white cloak, making a most dismal view for those who on that day and the next were going to look at their country for the last time.

The parade was held under the galleries of the barrack-yards, the men being all in their overcoats. I guessed what

was coming, for while the squads were falling in I was detached, with a picket of twelve men, to assist the military police in watching all the issues to the barracks that were not under the care of the guards. Every possible mode of egress was protected that day. The men, when they came leaping and hooraying off parade, found themselves prisoners in barracks. There was no going out, save with a written pass, and all passes were closely scrutinized by the sergeant at the guard-house.

Some of the men hoorayed because they were glad, others because the rest cheered. It is the rule to put a good face upon the inevitable on such occasions, and in the first moment of excitement everybody pretends to be pleased or indifferent. During the daytime nobody makes any reckless attempt to break out of barracks; it is only after nightfall that the guards and pickets must hold themselves ready for any sort of violence short of a charge with fixed bayonets.

Presently I saw Bob Wilde come bounding and flourishing his arms exultingly over the snowy parade. He was among the drafted, and, with a kindness which he very poorly requited, the colonel had remitted the remainder of his punishment, so that he might not spend this last day on English soil in cells. Being free, Bob Wilde made sure that he should recover his full liberty that night. "He warn't going to be stewed out in Injie, not he." Halloing and laughing as he ran up to me and shook my hand, he declared he was going to have some fun. "What do you bet I don't sleep in barracks to-night, corporal? Hooray! They might send out a hundred men on picket, I'd give 'em all the slip." And he capered off to have a long and luscious swig of stout in the canteen.

There was plenty to do in barracks all that day. The washerwomen presently came racing over the snow from the

married quarters, with the flannel shirts and socks of the men who were going. At twelve there was kit inspection in the rooms, and at two the draft were paraded in fullest marching order. They wore all the things they were going to carry. The knapsacks were closely packed, with the mess-tins strapped on outside ; water-bottles and bread-bags were slung over the shoulder ; boots were worn over the trousers. All the men were not in equally good condition. They were the pick of the dépôt so far as wind and growth of limb went, but that was not saying much. Some were flushed in the face and already drunk.

Yes, some were drunk, and others wore an air of blank consternation. Among these last I noticed a man whose face I vaguely remembered to have seen before. I could not for a time recall where, but at last I spotted my man as being the sickly, sneaky painter whom I had seen collared by his wife in the yard of St. George's Barracks. Corporal Swipthorpe had told me then that this was one of the fellows who earn good wages through the summer, but, saving nothing, either live upon their wives in the winter, or else enlist to get a good Christmas dinner in barracks, while their wives and children, maybe, are starving at home. This valuable member of society had been rescued from enlistment on the day when I had last seen him, but he had found means to slip his collar since, and there he was, whining and trembling under his busby at the awful summons he had received to go thousands of miles over the sea, and perhaps remain away twelve years.

I asked him how long he had been at the dépôt. "Oh, corporal, only a fortnight," he whimpered ; "and ain't it a cruel shame to send me over the sea like that without a word of warning? I'm a married man, corporal, and whatever my poor wife is to do without me I don't know."

"Make a declaration that you are a married man, and

sixpence a day will be stopped from your pay and regularly sent to your wife."

This assurance, of course, did not suit the loving husband at all, and he pretended not to hear. "It will kill my poor wife when she hears I'm gone," he maundered; "and it will kill me too. Look how poorly I am."

He certainly had little more flesh about him than an asthmatic chicken, but he was of age to bear the Indian climate, and it was likely to do him more good than harm. "You should have stayed with your wife that day when she found you at St. George's Barracks and carried you off," I said.

"St. George's Barracks?" he answered, with open mouth.

"Yes, yes; I was there and saw it all."

He was dumb after that, marvelling, no doubt, whether I did not know too much about him. He shivered and maundered the rest of the day, and made an attempt to get sent into hospital for blood-spitting; but that is an old trick, and he was told that the surgeon on board the troopship would cure him of his complaint, whatever it was. The miserable fellow would certainly have given himself up as a deserter, if that could have saved him; but he had doubtless satisfied himself by inquiry that the only effect of his self-denunciation would be that he would be tried for his desertion on his *return* from India, whenever that might happen. Once a man is drafted he must sail; and no tricks avail, for too many are attempted.

After parade, Sergeant-Major Harden came up to me, his cap and shoulders all powdered with snow, and said, "I don't half like the look of some of them chaps. If the colonel would let me clap a dozen of 'em into the guard-room till to-morrow we might sleep quiet. As it is, you'll have to go out with a picket of twelve into the town, and I

don't promise you that you won't be tramping about in the snow till morning."

"Never mind, sergeant-major; I'd rather do it than that you should have to."

"Ay, ay; you've younger legs than mine. But I shall have to be out too. Maybe we shall have four pickets abroad at once, all hunting like packs after a few of these roughs. Now, look here; as soon as it gets dark some of 'em will try to get out of barracks with a rush, and a party will be safe to make for the road near the martello tower, where there's only one sentry. I've sent six men to keep that pass, but that won't be enough after dusk. So at five just you go with twelve men, and remain till seven, when you'll be relieved. At nine I'll send you into the town."

"No arms, I suppose, sergeant-major?"

"No arms, no; but you know, up in that dark road, where no townspeople are looking on, if any of those rowdy chaps use their fists, just tell your men to hit back. Don't let any of the chaps slip: that's the point."

These orders were almost as seriously given as if they concerned an enemy in war, and I prepared to act in consequence. The snow, which had fallen intermittently throughout the day, began to drop again in large, soft, noiseless flakes towards dusk; and the twelve men whom I marshalled just before five o'clock would sooner have gone anywhere than to the job that lay before us. A dark, snowy night; a road that afforded no shelter; no glory to win, but only "bobbies'" work to do in stopping chums from going out larking—this was enough to disgust any old soldier, and particularly Bill Short, who was one of my squad, and who swore heartily in muffled tones all across the parade until I ordered silence in the ranks.

The picket of six whom we relieved were absolutely numbed and inarticulate with cold—a cruel wet cold, which

had soaked their overcoats like blotting-paper ; a far worse thing than the fiercest dry frost, which can be parried if you keep the blood active. They had no news to give. They had been on the watch two hours, and not a soul had gone by, except the five men from the Isle of Grain boat on their return journey from the island. Bill Short, now we had come to a halt, grumbled louder than ever. "No, and nobody won't come here if we stopped till we was all froze. What's the blooming use of our being here when every blooming kid in barracks knows that there's a picket of twelve men on this road to stop 'em? Is it likely any blooming jackass would run against twelve men? Dern yer, get a-along !"

It was not worth while pointing out to Bill Short that his argument had a flaw. I did not much think that, knowing we were here, anybody *would* try to pass, but it might have been different had anybody come to reconnoitre and had found the pass unguarded. At all hazards, I divided my men into three parties—four at the bottom of the road, four halfway up, and four under shelter of the martello tower. I heard some of the men laugh contemptuously at this strategy as they took up their posts ; but I had reflected that if a party of four or five desperate men came up under some plausible excuse to a party of twelve, and made a sudden dash among them, it was likely that one or two might get clear. I did not feel quite sure of how my men would act standing in a body, depressed and sulky with cold, and harbouring secret sympathies towards "the chaps who wanted to go out for a lark." By separating them I could prevent the disaffection from leavening the whole lump, and I could put each party on its mettle in case equal or superior numbers came to try conclusions with it.

Bill Short was placed with the party under the shelter of the martello tower—three veterans like himself. These men,

accustomed to torrid climes, felt the cold severely, and snarled like angry bears. They did not swear so long as I stood beside them, but whenever I walked away they gave tongue, all four together, with a wealth of curses to beggar any cadger's vocabulary. It was useless to try and coax them into good humour ; so I did not try, but kept running or walking up and down the road, as much to warm myself as to keep an eye on the two foremost parties.

An hour passed and not a soul appeared. The snow was falling still, and every step one made pressed through the deep snow with a crunching sound, and glued hard lumps of congealed flakes to the soles of one's boots. At last five men loomed in sight, toiling as quickly up to the road as they could go ; but they were the men of the Isle of Grain boat. As they strode under the gas-lamp in front of the admiral's house (where a sentry was dancing one long shuffling hornpipe to keep his feet warm), I recognized their sailor hats and rough jerseys. They passed the first party, answering words of chaffing good-night by some surly complaint about having to cross the river in such weather. They went by the second party, and advanced towards me, who was at the top of the road.

But a presentiment struck me. "Halt !" I cried. "Who goes there ?"

"Isle of Grain crew," was the quick answer.

"Bombardier of the boat, advance ; all the others, halt !"

The men should have halted at my first challenge, but they did not. They spread across the road and ran forward. "Ho, picket ! help !" I shouted, and flew at the man nearest me, whom I caught by the throat of his jersey.

He dealt me a blow which made me feel as if my nose were flattened and spread all over my face, then a kick on the shin, which turned me nearly sick, and made me drop on one knee. I had to release my hold, and he dashed

past me. Bill Short and the veterans had meanwhile come to the rescue, and the other eight men were hurrying up the road, while the sentry, alarmed at the noise, fired a blank cartridge to call the guard from the main-guard house. This cartridge in exploding belched out a flash and made a report as if the whole garrison were being called to arms. It was after a few seconds answered by a distant bugle, which announced that the guard was coming.

Blinded by the blood, which streamed over my hands, and limping from the excruciating pain in the leg, I turned with fury, as soon as I rose from my knee, and ran into a medley of men, all fighting. Two were on the ground struggling desperately with two others lying on them. One had got clear off. The man who had hit me was stopped in trying to pass Bill Short, whom he knocked down. I got in front of him, and seized him again. He hit me in the eye; but I returned the blow, and forcing him back with a run over the slippery shingle, I brought such weight to bear that he lost his balance and was rammed with his shoulders and head against the wall, receiving a shock which made his tongue start from his mouth and for a moment stunned him. His hat had now fallen off, and I recognized Bob Wilde.

"Give us a chance," he gasped, as soon as he could speak. I let go of him, but he made another charge at me, and for a moment we fought in the hammer-and-tongs fashion. I got much the worst of it, for my overcoat and cape prevented my having free play with my arms. Bob's fist crashed on my face five or six times; I only managed to hit him twice. But Bob was overpowered by the coming up of the guard, one of the men giving him a blow with the stock of his carbine on the pit of the stomach which stretched him flat. Five men of the picket had now scampered off in pursuit of the fellow who had escaped along the beach, and whom they soon overtook. The snow having

blurred all the outlines of the shore, he had run knee-deep into a mud-bank of the river, whence he floundered out into the arms of his pursuers.

Thus all our black sheep were brought back safe into the fold of the prison guard-room ; but the sheep-dogs and I, the shepherd, were in a pretty condition. Only six were unhurt, whom I left to guard the road lest other larkers should come ; but the other six, who escorted the prisoners, were more or less badly mauled. I, however, was so fearfully battered that when I staggered into the soldiers' guard-room, nearly blind, to wash my face, the men on guard clustered round me with a chorus of fright and astonishment.

My face was clotted with blood, my two eyes were almost closed up, there was not a whole spot on my cheeks, and my head was giddy with pain. Hot water was brought me, and I sponged away mechanically, my sight fast failing me as the swelling round my eyes increased, till presently Sergeant-Majors Burlow and Harden marched in. I could but dimly see them.

"What's your report, corporal?" asked Burlow.

"Five prisoners, sir," I answered, tottering to my feet.

"Why, d—n it, you've been nicely used," cried Harden, with concern. "Who dared to hit you like that?"

"I can't say, sergeant-major ; it was all fair give and take."

I would not for a great deal have got Bob Wilde into trouble for striking a corporal. After his recent scrapes it might have brought him a sentence of penal servitude. Before being led away to finish my night in hospital, I whispered to one of the soldiers to tell him that he need be in no fear for what he had done to me. All the same, his dodge of borrowing the clothes of the Isle of Grain crew had been a very ingenious one.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TEMPERANCE MEETING.

I SAW no more of Bob Wilde, for next morning, when the draft marched away, I was not in a condition to see anything. From my hospital cot, where I lay with my head bandaged like an Egyptian mummy's, I heard the band play "The Girls we leave Behind us," as the men India-bound tramped down to the railway station, followed by a troop of cheering boys and by the girls to be left behind—roystering damsels enough for the most part, though soft-hearted and very tearful on such occasions as these.

We heard that the night had been a riotous one—that some soldiers who had got into the town had grossly misbehaved themselves, had been carried into barracks with their faces downwards, and so on; but all these little freaks were overlooked in the morning. The account of the men drafted was complete, not one of them was missing; and away they all went, the bad with the good, shoulder to shoulder, to begin a new phase of military life, the townspeople cheering them off much as the provost cheered off Bonnie Dundee, holding the "guid toon" well rid of them.

To many of the most troublesome characters in the army, life in India is one of regeneration. It was so to Bob Wilde, who throve like a sound young tree transplanted from a bad soil into a good. I was touched at receiving a letter from him, which he wrote on board the *Jumma* troop-

ship an hour before it steamed, to say how sorry he was for having struck me, and how he hoped I should not think the worse of him for that. "Now I'm going," he wrote, "I don't so much mind ; but it was the *thought* of going that so plagued me. It ain't pleasant for a chap to think he's going over the seas for years to a place where he doesn't know a soul, and leaving all his chummies behind."

Who Bob Wilde's "chummies" were can be imagined. His ties with Whitechapel and Seven Dials were snapped off ; Moll Flanders and Bill Sykes, Fagin and Tommy Dodd would know him no more ; he had seen his last for many years—and it might be for life—of London gaols and tramp wards, of slums, gin-shops, receiving houses, penny gaffs, and the devil. The door of his past life had been closed behind him with a slam ; and he could no more slink back through it into courses which would have led him to Dartmoor, by the simple expedient of shuffling off his uniform and deserting. His last brilliant experiment in that line, when he had purloined the clothes of the Isle of Grain boatmen for himself and "chummies," had failed ; and for the future there was nothing for it but to accustom himself to the uniform which would stick tight to his skin, and endeavour to make it sit upon him as comfortably as possible. Which Bob Wilde accordingly did.

In the regular letters which Forringer sent me from India, he always made mention of Bob Wilde, who was getting on well. Bob became an officer's servant ; he is in India still to this day, wears corporal stripes, and talks of remaining his twenty-one years in the service to become a sergeant-major and get his pension. Perhaps we shall see him some day or other among the Beefeaters of the Tower, his breast covered with medals, or a commissionaire guarding the treasures of a Bond Street jeweller. He will shake his head with a very knowing gravity then at gay young

blades from Whitechapel who make footballs of policemen's helmets.

So it is with many who, getting the chance to turn over a new leaf, flatten the page well down that it may never flutter up again ; but there are some, of course, to whom the exile to India is a very grievous visitation. Here was a hard case, among others. A steady young soldier, who had been four years in the army, fell in love and married without leave from his colonel. He was not put in cells for this crime, as he might have been ; but his wife was ignored. She could not get the "indulgence" of rooms and rations in the married quarters, nor so much as the indulgence to take in soldiers' washing at her lodgings in the town. The authorities are obliged to be severe in discouraging unlicensed marriages, for, if they showed leniency in one case, many women of a by no means eligible sort would be enticed into marrying soldiers on the chance of getting "indulgence" some day or other by dint of importuning. In this instance, however, the husband and wife were honest people, and dearly attached to each other. The soldier had a good conduct stripe, which added twopence a day to his pay, and he was employed in the wheelwright's shop, where he earned fifteen shillings a month. Everything he got was given to his wife ; and she, never idle, sat all day at her sewing machine, making waistcoats for a tailor. Two children were born to them, and a third was coming, when the soldier was ordered to India. His wife made pitiable entreaties to the colonel that she might be sent out on the troopship with the wives of the other soldiers married with "indulgence," but it was of no avail. She had married with a knowledge of what a soldier's condition is, and must abide by the consequences. So her husband sailed without her ; and their only resource then was to save all they could, so that she might join him in two or three years by paying her

passage out. There is no moral to this story, except that women who marry soldiers must understand that they do so for better or for worse ; but one can sympathize with the grief of the honest fellow who sailed with such a heavy heart, and with the sorrow of his young wife left behind. To him and to her there was nothing very exhilarating in the popular tune which the band played as the train steamed out of Sheerness station with its freight of soldiers leaning out of the carriage windows, waving their hands to the responsive flutter of women's handkerchiefs wet with tears.

The mementoes of Bob Wilde's friendship which I bore on my countenance kept me in hospital for a week. I issued thence with eyes bloodshot and surrounded by deep custard-coloured borders—a disreputable figure altogether, and unfit to be seen on parade or guard. So I was sent temporarily to fill the berth which George Tudor had left vacant as librarian in the recreation-rooms. A parcel of books came down at that time from Pall Mall for the use of the soldiers, and I had to catalogue and number them. A capital selection it was, and it led me to examine the ledgers, which Tudor had kept in good order, and to see what works were in most request. I found, as might have been expected, that only about twenty soldiers per cent., including non-commissioned officers, used the library at all. Several borrowed books intending to read, but never did so, and were troublesome in keeping their volumes long over time, and saying with an injured air when asked for them, "Why, I haven't got through the first blooming chapter yet." Among the constant readers was a little clique to whom the library must have been a boon, for they devoured everything, and came back for fresh works every two days. The favourite novelists were Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Miss Braddon, Marryat, Lever, Mrs. Wood ; Thackeray was but in moderate request ; but Scott was in general favour. Among the books always "out"

was Smiles' "Self-Help;" I noticed that some soldiers had read it several times, and it was never on the shelves an hour without being pounced upon. Books of travel, tales of emigration, books of military adventure, all had their fanciers (the last kind much fewer than one might suppose, for so small a number of them treat of the private soldier's life); but religious works were scarcely asked for at all.

It must not be inferred from this that there was no religious "movement" at the dépôt. Religiousness was less perceptible there than in other garrisons, because soldiers seldom remained in the place long; but among the men were some of a truly pious disposition. Whilst I was librarian a temperance society in Sheerness got leave to give a tea in the recreation-rooms at twopence a head, with some speeches to follow. About three hundred soldiers attended. Three long tables were completely filled with them, and they disposed of the tea, plum-cake, and bread and butter provided for them *ad libitum* with no little voracity, but with tolerable good order. On the stage was a table spread for the promoters of the entertainment, about twenty strong, including some young ladies and ladies who were not young. Trumpet-Major Drummond was there. The minister of the Presbyterian congregation was foremost among the patrons; but the garrison chaplain, a gentleman more amiable than enthusiastic, doubtless looked upon the proceedings as bad form, and was absent.

After the tables had been cleared forms were drawn near the stage, and the speeches began. A gentleman named Butt, who described himself humorously as Water-Butt, and gave us a good deal of this joke, spoke at some length in an amusing vein on the blessings of temperance. He was a water-drinker, but would fight any beer-drinker at catch-weight for ten shillings' worth of Bibles, to be distributed in the hospitals. A soldier from the further end of

the room answered, "Come on!" but Mr. Water-Butt disposed of this interrupter by requesting him to let the company "have a look at him." The soldier being facetiously hustled to his feet by his neighbours, proved, of course, to be a man ill fitted to match Mr. Butt, and he was further discomfited by being asked to lay down his ten shillings if he meant business. Mr. Water-Butt, having thus triumphed amid general laughter, concluded by proposing that his antagonist should fight a much more ticklish foe than himself, and that was—the devil. "Just you send a challenge to Beelzebub, my man, and I'll give you a flag that will prevent him from ever touching you, if you only hold fast to it and wave it in his face. It's this;" and Mr. Butt flourished the blank form of a temperance pledge.

Some other speeches followed, mostly well delivered; for the orators knew the kind of audience they were addressing, and attempted no high flights. One solemn young lady, however, who had come with an address written out, got intimidated when her turn arrived, and collapsed altogether when a soldier, by way of nerving her, as she stood blushing and coughing to read, proposed three cheers for "her young man," which were uproariously given. In the pause that followed this little incident, a recruit rose to speak. He was quite a young man, who looked "softy"—not at all the sort of youth from whom one could have expected any striking utterance; but he surprised us all by delivering the best speech of the evening. The matter and manner of this oration were alike remarkable, for he spoke in plain, fluent language, never hesitating for a word or running off his line, which tended straight to this point—that too many temptations to drink were put in the way of the people, soldiers as well as others. He described drink as the common enemy of mankind—"the devil in bottle," the inspirer of all foolish thoughts and mad actions. He was loudly cheered when he

sat down. But here Mr. Water-Butt committed a mistake by asking him in a benevolent tone if he had taken the pledge, evidently awaiting an affirmative reply.

The young man's reply of "No" evoked a good deal of laughter, as if it were inconsistent with his staunch profession; but this was absurd, for taking the pledge can only be a means to an end, and if this young fellow could keep sober without such means, there was no reason why he should have bound himself by a useless oath.

This was a point which all the temperance speakers overlooked. They had fettered themselves with a vow, and insisted that their hearers must do the same. One of them said that he had been in the habit for some years of drinking a stiff glass of grog before going to bed. He had discontinued this practice, and felt all the better for it; *ergo* every man who drank a glass of beer at dinner was trifling with his health and with his soul by indulging in pernicious gluttony. The gentleman who said these things was inclined to corpulency, and would possibly have found himself all the better for leaving off tea and plum-cake. I admit, however, that uncompromising advocacy such as his has more effect upon impressionable drunkards than any plea for moderation. All experience shows that a man who drinks immoderately can be more easily weaned from drink altogether than taught to use it with temperance.

At the close of the meeting soldiers were told that they could either sign the pledge there at once, or any day at the offices of the Society. No signatures were obtained in the room, for it would have required a pretty strong dose of moral courage for a man to have marched up the platform and publicly abjured the pewter pot in the presence of three hundred laughing soldiers, especially if he had been known before as a devotee of the canteen. Perhaps some pledges were signed at the office.

One may sometimes find in tracts stories of soldiers who have faced the ridicule of barrack-rooms, and even endured to be kicked and pelted with shoes for kneeling down to say their prayers every morning and night. I must say I never saw a man say his prayers in a barrack-room ; but I think if one were to do so he would be treated according to the sincerity that was believed to be in him. If a man wishes to be religious in barracks he must take care to make his acts square with his appearances, and he must strive to be an efficient soldier as well as a good Christian ; for if he shirked any part of his duty from giving too much time to his devotions, every man's hand would be against him. Such religious men as I knew were all among the best soldiers. They generally attended Dissenting chapels on Sunday evenings—the preachers at these places of worship being more strenuous in doctrine, and speaking in language plainer to understand than those of the Church of England. But the Presbyterian minister at Sheerness was a forcible preacher, too, and much run after. He used to hold his services in the upper recreation-room, having at that time no kirk of his own, and his congregation included all those soldiers who would not be rated as Anglicans or Roman Catholics. I think I have already mentioned that the military authorities recognize only three forms of faith.

Before leaving the subject, I must tell of a soldier who came to Sheerness shortly after I was discharged, and who took up with religion (so they say) as a means of getting sent out of the service. His name was Longdale, and finding military discipline unpleasant, he suddenly became a fanatical preacher. He announced that he had received a mission from on high to preach the Word, and preach it he did with considerable eloquence in all sorts of public places, attracting large crowds of the townspeople. This could not be tolerated, and he was told that he must not

preach except in covered buildings; but on the next Sunday after he had received this order, he coolly went out with a chair to the cricket-ground—the colonel's beloved cricket-ground—and preached to a thousand people, who trampled the turf down as a drove of bullocks. The indignant colonel had Longdale tried by regimental court-martial, and he was sentenced to fourteen days in cells. On his release with a closely cropped head he began again; and, what is worse, he publicly rebuked an officer on parade for swearing. The offender was Lieutenant Fowle, who, having his cap blown off by the wind, had let fly a too sonorous oath. Longdale in a loud, fearless voice cried to him that he had broken “both God's commandment and the Queen's Regulations, to the contempt of his duty as a Christian and an officer.” Lieutenant Fowle was so ill advised as to shriek, “Take that d—d canting hypocrite to the guard-room.”

But upon this there was a fine public hubbub, which got into the papers. In a continental army Longdale would have found himself clapped into a lunatic asylum, but in England any man who appears to be persecuted for religion is sure to have sympathizers. When Longdale was sentenced to a new term of twenty-eight days in cells, public meetings were held to express sympathy for him, and to hold up Lieutenant Fowle to execration. The London papers teemed with letters about the profanity of officers, and luckless Mr. Fowle was favoured with a series of vehement reprimands from his colonel, his general, and from the Horse Guards. Finally a public subscription was raised to buy Longdale his discharge, and, swelled with offerings from all parts of the country, it realized more than six hundred pounds. The authorities were heartily glad to get rid of the man, who would have become a serious nuisance had he remained in the service. After his discharge, Longdale married a fond disciple who had some money, and

regularly established himself as an Independent minister in London, where a chapel was built for him. He is the founder of a sect who call themselves "Longdaleians," to this day.

In assuming that this man shammed religiousness for his own purposes, I am only repeating what was believed by those who knew him best before his so-called conversion ; but people who take up religion for a design may sometimes cling to it in earnest, and there is no reason to suppose that Longdale did not become a sincere zealot, when he found himself hailed and hearkened to as one inspired.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A HUE AND CRY FOR A DESERTER.

My wounds were healed, and I was expecting to get my discharge in about a week, when I was sent on my final piece of important duty. I had to go up to Millbank Penitentiary in London, to identify the Irishman O'Rourke as a deserter and bring him back to Sheerness.

Considering how soon I was to resume living in London as a civilian, I would rather not have been despatched to the regions of Westminster on such an errand. However, I could be better spared for the duty than any other corporal just then, and so I had to toddle. I took a gunner with me, and we were both accoutred in heavy marching order, with overcoats, capes, and busbies, and six rounds of ball-cartridge in our pouches.

Starting at about eight, we reached Victoria Station soon after ten and drove in a four-wheeler to the prison. My companion, a smart merry young fellow named Tom Berry, was rather disappointed by this arrangement, for he would have been glad of a long tramp through the streets of the metropolis with all his war-paint on. But my own fancy was the other way, and I was willing to defray cab fares to expedite a not too dignified job.

Our cab drove into the courtyard of the prison, and we marched into a stone-flagged passage, where we had to wait

about half an hour after I had exhibited my warrant. I am afraid to say how many military prisoners there were in Millbank at the time, but one of the warders, himself an old soldier, told me the place swarmed with them. Millbank was not intended for a military prison, but it has almost become one from circumstances. Every regiment in the service seemed to have a blackguardly representative there undergoing sentence of court-martial, and the greater part of them were deserters.

After a time we were conducted into an exercise-yard, where a score of prisoners, some in uniform, others in plain clothes—very plain indeed, to say nothing else—were drawn up in a line for my scrutiny. I had no trouble in singling out O'Rourke, and indeed, so soon as I had called his name, the red-headed scamp capered forward, holding out his hand and crying as if I were his most intimate friend, "Arrah, mee boy, how are ye now? It's glad Oi am to see ye, by mee sowle."

He was dressed in the muddiest, most tattered suit of tramp's clothes I had seen for a long day. His hat was the filthy crown of a wideawake, from which the rim had been torn, and there was a hole at the top, so that it was not unlike a black flower-pot. The only sound part of his attire was his boots, and thereby hung a tale, for these boots had led to his detection. On coming to town with McRonagh and Boyle, the three had hastened to sell their uniforms, and, intending to re-enlist as soon as they had spent their money, they had bought the cheapest old suits they could find. But O'Rourke, unable to procure a pair of old shoes to fit him, had kept his regimental wellingtons, purposing to burn out the numbers presently. This, however, he forgot to do, and later in the day getting hopelessly drunk and separated from his companions, he had mixed in a street brawl, had assaulted a policeman, and had been

taken to the lock-up. When he was undressed at the station the mark "R.A.," with a broad arrow and a number, proclaimed that he was wearing the boots of a Royal Artilleryman; and his number being forwarded to Woolwich and thence to Sheerness, an answer was returned that it was that of a deserter. O'Rourke meanwhile had been sentenced to twenty-one days' hard labour for his assault on the police, and he had just undergone his three weeks' exercise on the treadmill when I came to fetch him. Unfortunately he had been recognized in the prison by a warder who was his sergeant in a line regiment from which he had deserted before, without having been captured since, and this leading to a closer scrutiny of his person, he was found to bear some tattoo marks which another warder declared to be peculiar to a Highland regiment in which he had himself served. Thereupon O'Rourke, being "spotted," felt moved to square his accounts with Her Majesty in one lump, and confessed to two other desertions, making five in all. He had therefore a pretty tidy defaulter's bill to pay.

The formalities for this good citizen's transfer to me were soon accomplished, and he walked out of the prison between Berry and me; but when he espied the cab in the yard his face became a blank. "Arrah now, corporal, ye're not in such a hurree to git back? Why can't we walk?"

"Riding will tire you much less, O'Rourke," I said. "Jump in, man."

"Well, but, corporal darlin', ye'll be givin' me something to eat, won't ye? Sorra a bit of mate has passed mee lips since Oi've bin in this place. Bee me sowle, Oi've only tasted skilly."

"You shall have some dinner," I said, as the cab moved off, O'Rourke and I being on the hind seat, and Berry in front.

"And a dhrop o' beer—eh, corporal?—and a poipe of 'baccy. Sure now, and Oi'll starve if Oi don't have a dhrop o' beer."

I had not been allowed money to supply O'Rourke with a dinner, but I was willing enough to regale him, as this would probably be the last good meal he would have for some years. The question was how I could do this with any safety. To take him into the restaurant of the railway station was not to be thought of, for his presence there would draw a crowd. On the other hand, were I to entertain him in a public-house he might attempt to escape. If Berry and I had been unarmed, in our caps and jackets, I should have had no fear, but our heavy accoutrements and carbines made us as unfit to chase an active, slippery fellow like O'Rourke as two porcupines to hunt a fox. We had been given ball cartridges in pursuance of a mere tom-foolish routine, for we were not to use them. How could we have fired upon our prisoner in a London street? On the whole, I decided to risk a dinner in a public-house, but I first administered a caution to my gaol-bird: "You shall have a good feed, some beer, and a pipe, O'Rourke, but if you try to escape I'll break your head."

"Is it escaping, ye mane?" asked O'Rourke, with an injured air, as if I were making a gratuitous imputation on his honour. "Sure now, and shouldn't Oi be a blackguard intirely if Oi did such a thing after all your koinddness?"

"All right; we shall see. But you, Berry, recollect that if our friend here gives us the slip, we shall spend a week in cells."

I stopped our cabman at a large corner public-house near the end of the Vauxhall Bridge Road. It was a respectable place, which had several entrances, and announced itself as a commercial hotel where dinners could be had. Taking the Irishman by the wrist as he alighted, I passed

him through the private entrance, and a word to the landlord secured us a room to ourselves upstairs. A pot-boy came up to light the fire; then a trim waitress entered to lay the cloth; then the landlord showed himself to take our orders; next the landlady looked in to see if everything was tidy. All the household wanted to stare at the prisoner, who looked villainous enough, with his carroty head of a week's growth, and his small eyes twinkling with defiant mockery. While waiting for dinner, O'Rourke solaced himself with a pipe and a pot, and spoke little.

We were to be served at twelve o'clock, as the joints would not be ready till that hour, but that did not signify, as our train for Sheerness did not start till half-past one. Berry and I divested ourselves of our overcoats, knapsacks, and arms—which was contrary to rule, but conformable to common sense. We put these things in a corner on the same side of the room as the door, and when we sat down to table Berry and I placed ourselves between the door and our prisoner.

He conducted himself properly, however, and the dinner of roast veal and ham, with plenty of beer and an apple tart at the end, drew from him numberless assurances of "gratitude." Once his tongue was loosened he talked incessantly, and excited a little of our pity by recounting the uninterrupted run of bad luck that had pursued him since he joined the Artillery. "Sure now, if it hadn't been for the stoppages of pay, Oi should have stayed in the 'Tillery to the end of mee loife. Oi'm getting past the age for deserting now, and faith, when Oi last took the shillin' Oi swore to meeself Oi'd be the steadiest boy in the sarvice. But it's no use soldierin' on a penny a day, and that's all Oi've had for months, sure as Oi'm a sinner."

He then related (and was speaking the truth) that three months after enlisting he had slipped in carrying a pail of

whitewash, and had so burnt his clothes that he had been obliged to order a new suit. Not long afterwards, a deserter made off with his new jacket, his overcoat, and a pair of boots. These losses, which did not accrue from any fault of his own, laid him under a hopeless load of debt towards the tailor, and for weeks he had drawn only a penny or twopence a day. I reminded him, however, that he had not shown much care for his clothes on the night when I had seen him roll himself in the street mud. "Thru for you," he answered ; "but thin Oi was reckless, corporal. Sure, and isn't it any mother's son who'd lose heart at having his pay stopped? When Oi got dhrunk that night Oi'd already made up mee mind to go into a new corps, and it's in the Roifles Oi meant to go. Faith, and if Oi'd joined the Roifles there isn't a boy who'd have worn the Queen's liverree more proudly than meeself."

"Well, you've done with soldierin' now," remarked Berry, with a broad laugh, in allusion to the sentence O'Rourke might expect.

"Sure and Oi'm glad of it," was the answer. "Mee counthree can do without mee for a year or two, and thin Oi'll just be steady for the remainder of mee loife. There's always wages for a steady man to earn, Oi'm thinking."

O'Rourke's vows of steadiness were delivered with true Milesian coolness. However, he did seem so resigned to his fate, and drew his chair so composedly to the fire, to have one more pipe after dinner, that I was lulled into momentary security. I rang for the waitress to bring up the bill, and Berry and I prepared to don our accoutrements.

I had just passed one arm through a sleeve of my overcoat, and Berry was helping me with the other, when the servant girl entered. In an instant O'Rourke made a dart towards the open door, gave the maid a violent shove which sent her tumbling into our arms, and bounded down-

stairs four steps at a time. The waitress screamed ; Berry, in rushing forward, overthrew her and tripped over her body ; I had to tear off my overcoat and jump over them both before I could give chase. The whole thing occurred in the twinkling of an eye. I ran down in my tunic, without a belt or head-covering on. As we were in the hotel part of the house, O'Rourke had not been obliged to pass through the bar, but had bolted through the private passage. The noise he made in descending and the shrieks of the waitress had, however, alarmed the landlord and landlady, who ran excitedly out of the bar just as I issued into the street and saw O'Rourke disappear up a side alley. I flew after him without calling "Stop thief !" but my uniform was enough to arouse attention, and in a moment I had a mob, chiefly of boys, careering at my heels and yelling. Up the alley, down a passage, across a street, and into another alley I went, keeping O'Rourke in sight ; but now there was a large crowd running with me, and a hallooing cad, getting purposely in my way, put out his foot and brought me heavily to the ground. When I scrambled up, a dozen other cads barred my progress, and hustled me, not doing so as if they meant it, but jostling one another and crying, "Get out of the sojer's way, Bill, can't ye ? Why don't ye stand out of his light ?" But so saying, they contrived not to let me pass. When I had elbowed my way through them O'Rourke was out of view—clean gone, like a rat down a drain.

Berry had now come up breathless, and a policeman made his appearance ; but the crowd had quite choked up the alley, and although we lingered on the spot for ten minutes, making a useless pretence of peering into courts and passages, we felt our search to be hopeless. The crowd did not offer us any insult, but good-humouredly made fun of us, feigning to be quite civil : "Will you give me a penny if I find him, corporal ? Put down a pot o' beer, and

I'll fetch him by the ears in ten minutes," and so on. I know of no country in Europe where a mob of lawless characters collects so quickly as in the streets of an English city. We got not a word of sympathy. Some respectable bystanders remarked that it served us right for taking a prisoner to drink in a public-house. The policeman, not unfriendly, but contemptuous, said, "What a precious pair of flats you must be!"

Flats indeed! As we trudged back bareheaded to the tavern, I thought disconsolately enough of the scrape into which I had got by good-naturedly giving O'Rourke a dinner. No excuses could or would be accepted for my having allowed my prisoner to escape. On returning to barracks I should be placed under arrest, and tried by court-martial for neglect of duty, and if I missed punishment it could only be by my discharge arriving before the finding of the court was made public. How I blamed my stupidity in not having accepted the leave that had been proffered me! All I had got by remaining a few extra weeks in the army was to be well thrashed by Bob Wilde, and now to be outwitted by O'Rourke, who would cause me to spend my last days in barracks as a prisoner. My companion, Berry, was down in the mouth about his prospect of cells, but I tried to reassure him, saying I would take all the blame on myself.

The policeman accompanied us to the tavern, and I requested him to walk in, that he might take down my description of O'Rourke, and save me the trouble of having to go to the police-station. We had missed the 1.30 train to Sheerness, and would have to tarry two hours for another; so I ordered up a bottle of port to enable me to retain the private room, and when the policeman had gone, sat down by the fire, smoking and staring at the coals moodily. What disgusted me was the ridiculous nature of my adventure. If the Irishman had felled me with a poker and got off whilst

I was unconscious, I might have been blamed but not laughed at; whereas now everybody would laugh at as well as blame me. Colonel Spilman, I felt sure, would be gravely displeased, and Sir Rowland Horseley, when the sentence of my court-martial was sent up to him, would repent that he had promoted me to be a corporal. These musings made my cigar taste bitter and lent no flavour to the port.

We had been seated about an hour, when the landlord came running upstairs at a speed boding that he had news to bring, and some lighter steps followed his. He entered, pushing a small dirty boy in front of him, and exclaimed, "Corporal, here's a lad says he knows where your man is."

"By Jove! where is he?" and I started to my feet, Berry also clutching his carbine for a start.

"Please, sir, father wants to know what you'll give him if he tells you where the cove is," said the small boy, twirling a very greasy cap between grimy fingers.

"The boy wants to know what you'll give his father if he tells you where that chap is," repeated the landlord, as if he were interpreting.

"What ought I to give?" I asked, appealing to the landlord.

"Father 'ud get a suvrin if he gave a deserter up to the perlice," remarked the boy, who seemed to be sharp at driving a bargain. "He woan't take less na two p'und."

"Can you afford two pounds?" asked the landlord, who looked as if he doubted it.

I produced a five-pound note, and placed it in his hand. "Pay the boy yourself," I said, "but let us lose no time. Tell me where the man is, my lad."

"Ah, but yer can't go in those togs," said the boy. "Bless yer, all the row 'ud turn out to give yer a hidin';" and he sniggered at the bare idea.

I had my plain clothes at Laura Winkley's, but if I went to her house much time would be lost. The landlord declared he could not mix himself up in the matter, as it would give his house a bad name. He had been somewhat crusty at the disturbance which had taken place under his roof, but had been mollified a little by my subsequent order of a bottle of port, and by my giving his servant-girl half-a-crown. Still he was not disposed to put himself to any trouble beyond tendering me change for my note. "'Tain't like murder," he remarked shyly; "a deserter ain't a criminal."

"Well, but what am I to do if I can't go after this man in uniform, and if you won't help me?"

"Go to the perlice-station and ask 'em to send four constables in a cab. I dare say they'll do it if you give 'em a trifle each and pay the fare."

"Well, then, tell me, boy, where the man is," I said, controlling my irritation.

"I shan't tell yer until yer give me the money," answered he flatly.

"But if I give the boy the money he may run away and warn the man to be off."

"No, I shan't!" muttered the lad. "I doan't like the look of him enough for that."

"You'll have to chance it," was the landlord's discouraging observation; so I thought I would make a friend of the boy by promising him something for himself if he acted faithfully. "The two pounds are for your father," I said, "but you shall have two shillings for yourself if I catch this man."

His eyes gleamed: "Can't yer gi'e us the two bob now?"

"I'll give you one; you come back here after the thing is done, and the landlord will give you the other from me."

"I'll trust yer," replied the urchin, after a hard gaze at me. "The cove is at a small pub, the Dog-Nose, in Rack's Row, and I expects he won't stir out till dark."

"What makes you think that?"

"'Cos he went in and 'ad two goes of gin, forgettin' that he 'adn't got no money; so he 'ad to sit down and write a letter to a pal o' his to bring 'im some."

"But the messenger may have returned with the letter already?"

"It was me as was sent with the letter," replied the boy, with a grin and a wink.

"Are you then the son of the landlord at the Dog-Nose?"

"No, I ain't; father's a coster, and he followed the cove as was hookin' it from you. I went along o' him. When the chap went into the pub my dad waited a bit, and then walked in too, permiscuous; and I stood outside, 'cos he told me. Presently my dad whistles to me as if he didn't know me, and calls me into the pub. "Here, boy," says he, "is a bloke who wants to have a letter carried for him sharp, and he'll give yer a penny." So off I goes; but my dad he just winked to me, so I knew I'd got to wait for him round the corner. Sure enough, he comes out 'bout five minutes later, and says he, 'Just you cut off,' says he, 'and tell them sojers that I'll give 'em the deserter if they'll give me summat. And,' says he, 'if the cove leaves the Dog-Nose while ye're gone I'll follow 'im, and I'll set my mark at every street corner, so that you'll know which way I've gone.' That's what my dad said, and he's awful artful he is."

As the boy finished this narration of his father's cunning and treachery, he fished out the tail of his shirt from his trousers, and tied up in a corner of it the shilling I had given him for himself, having doubtless some misgivings


as to the paternal sanction to his retaining such a sum. The best part of his story to me was the assurance that the coster would follow O'Rourke wherever the latter went.

The upshot of all this was that Berry and I ran out, hailed a cab, and were driven to the Westminster police-station. Here we chartered four policemen, but not without immense difficulty, for the sergeant on duty was a consequential Dogberry, whose aptitudes for action were as slow as his understanding. He was five minutes perusing my pass and warrant; he told me to "hold my jaw" whilst he was considering what he should do; and he took upon himself to read me a lecture for having let my prisoner slip. I should have got nothing from this old obstructive if I had not drawn out money and offered a sovereign to divide amongst any policemen who might be willing to go to the Dog-Nose. This immediately attracted four constables who were just off duty, and who had been growling aloud a minute before when they had apprehended being sent on this expedition without payment. Sergeant Dogberry allowed them to go, but was as ill-natured about it as possible, till I pacified him by my humility and submission. I was obliged to swallow the leek in this way lest he should refuse to give me up the prisoner when his men had captured him. I quite believe he would have been glad to bring me to trouble merely to assert his own importance.

While the policemen were gone, we marched up and down outside the station, Berry very indignant at the sergeant's conduct. "Blank the old brute, I should like to know how we should have got on if you hadn't had any money? As it is, all this business will have cost you three months' pay."

"I shan't grudge the money, Berry, if we only bag the bird."

"You'll let me give him a good licking, eh, when we get him into the train? Just leave that to me."



"No, we mustn't touch him, and it would be a waste of breath to abuse him. He's a brute, and he behaved like one. It's all my fault."

"As you please," grumbled Berry; "but as he can't pay, I'd have taken it out of him for 'you in 'hide.' I wonder when we shall get back to Sheerness—not till the six o'clock train, I suppose?"

It was then four o'clock, and we stamped about for another mortal hour, too restless to sit down or to walk in regular steps, but turning our heads every time we heard a cab. At last, after innumerable cabs had rattled by, each one starting us with a false alarm, the long-wished-for vehicle arrived, with a policeman on the box and three others inside, bringing O'Rourke, who was speechless drunk and in a condition of unspeakable filth.

So drunk was he, that when they pulled him out of the cab and supported him over the pavement, he fell like a lump on the floor of the station, whence he was dragged by the heels into a cell to keep cool until next wanted. Never mind, beastly as he was I could have hugged him in my joy. I was so relieved that I submitted without a murmur to the extortion of the cabman, who charged an exorbitant fare, saying his cushions were damaged; to the no less shameless extortions of the policemen, who not only backed the cabman in his demands, but made me pay for a lot of drink consumed by O'Rourke, by themselves, and by "some parties" who had assisted them; and, finally, to the swindle of Sergeant Dogberry, who, seeing so much money going on, put in some preposterous claim of his own for "four and sixpence," which had to be acceded to. All these policemen behaved like cormorants, evidently under the impression that I was dispensing the taxpayers' money and had *carte blanche* from Government to be generous with the same.

My troubles with O'Rourke were not yet quite ended,

for when our time came for starting I had to get another cab and another policeman to go with us to the station and help to guard the prisoner whilst I took his ticket. At length we installed the Irishman in a third-class carriage. Whether he was really still drunk, or wished to avoid unpleasant explanations with me, he stretched himself on a seat and snored till near the end of the journey. When at Sittingbourne, however, I reminded him that I could not take a prisoner drunk into barracks, and so gave him his option between sitting up of his own free will or being persuaded thereto by a few raps with our carbine stocks. At this he sat up drowsily, rubbed his eyes, but pretended to be in such pain as to have no voice left. On alighting from the train, he walked quietly enough through the streets to the barracks, saying not a word all the way.

As soon as we had consigned him to the guard-room, I went with Berry to Sergeant-Major Burlow's quarters, to give him a truthful account of why we were so late. As "all's well that ends well," the grim sergeant-major deigned to smile. "You're enough punished by the money you've spent," he said; "but it would have gone hard with you, corporal, if you had not brought the man in."

I have only to add that for his five desertions and five thefts of kit O'Rourke got five years' penal servitude. Some statistician may be able to compute how much he cost the nation from first to last.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MY LAST NIGHT IN BARRACKS.

My last night in barracks was, appropriately enough, spent on guard. I was not aware that it was to be my last night; had I known it I should have got some one to take my place, and have secured a night's rest to prepare for the excitements of the morrow.

The corporal of the guard has in some sense the worst of a fatiguing duty, for though he does not mount as sentry, he has to go round with the reliefs every two hours, and thus never has more than an hour and three-quarters' rest at a time during the twenty-four hours. The sergeant of the guard may take things more easily. My sergeant on this occasion was a veteran of the Bill Short type, who only did what others could not do for him—drink and sleep, for instance—but who cheerfully let others do all that he could leave to their hands.

Every morning, at a quarter to nine, two guards were furnished of twelve men each, with a sergeant, a corporal, a bombardier, and a bugler. They were inspected by the parade-officer, who used invariably to out-herod the strictest sergeant in his zeal for detecting spots of dust on the men's overcoats or knapsacks. There was some reason in this, as sentries are for the nonce the sample soldiers of the barracks. All who pass the gates, whether military men or strangers,

judge by the smartness of the sentries of the discipline maintained in the whole corps.

Punctually at nine the new guards relieved those which had served since the previous morning. My last guard was at the gate house, a more favourite place than the main, as from it you could see the people passing up and down the streets all day. At nine, then, we marched to the gate, halted two deep opposite the guard to be relieved, and exchanged salutes. This done, I, as corporal, started off with four men to relieve the three sentries at the hospital, the magazine, and the ramparts, lastly relieving the sentry at the gate itself. After this a new salute, the old guard marched off, and we took possession of their quarters.

All guard-rooms are alike. A large fireplace with a big kettle on the hob, a table and benches, a long wooden camp-bed, and a desk where the sergeant keeps the passes delivered by the men on leave when they return, and two packets of cartridges—one of blank, one of ball—three of each sort being served out to every sentry and restored by him when he is relieved. Every man goes on sentry three times in the twenty-four hours for two hours' each time, so that he has four hours between each guard. When the weather is very cold, however, sentries are relieved oftener; in certain terrific frosts changes have been made every half-hour.

There is a printed table of rules hung in the sentry boxes, and every sentry is supposed to know them by heart. Sometimes a martinet officer will halt before a sentry and examine him in the matter, but he is obliged to rest satisfied if the man can repeat the general substance of his instructions. If a fire breaks out, a blank cartridge is to be fired to raise an alarm, and a crowbar in the box is to be used to turn on the water-main. At the approach of a senior officer, whether in uniform or not, or of the field

officer for the day, the whole guard is to turn out and salute. Arms are to be presented to certain officers, and "carried" to others. A sentry must not neglect to salute an officer, and when called to task answer like the Scotch sentry in *Punch* (standing pleasantly at ease all the while), "Dod, mon, A clean forgot."

When a sentry mounts guard near a harbour or wet dock, there is a life-belt in his box, which he must throw to any man in danger of drowning. A soldier being once sharply questioned as to his duties by an officer, got altogether flustered. "What should you do if you saw a man drowned?" the officer asked. "Fire a blank cartridge at un," was the faltering answer.

The gravest offences which a sentry can commit are to leave his post or go to sleep on it. To keep the night sentries awake strong black coffee is made in the evening, and every man who goes on from nine o'clock has a pint of it stiff enough to keep any person of a nervous disposition with all his senses on the stretch. On cold nights, however, drowsiness is very apt to creep over a man who stands motionless in his box, leaning against one of the sides ; and if once his eyes blink, off he goes into dreamland. In this case detection is certain, for not only must a sentry be awake when the corporal comes to relieve him, but he must challenge the corporal's round ten paces before it reaches his box, and if he omits to do this he will be punishable, although he may be broad awake when called out of his box. Again, the sentries are expected to cry out "All's well!" at every quarter of an hour of their vigil by the nearest striking clock.

A kind-hearted corporal will, of course, not be too hasty to convict a man of being asleep ; and yet it is very unsafe to carry indulgence too far, for every species of devilry is rife in the army. One cold night a corporal, finding a man

snoring with all his might, gave him a rough shake by the arm, and having started him from his slumbers, pretended not to have noticed that anything was amiss. One would have thought the soldier must have felt grateful. Not at all. The next time he was on guard with the same corporal, he said to the other men, "You can sleep as much as you please with this chap—he won't report you," and on his first night watch he made himself up comfortably for a good doze. This time the corporal reported him; but when brought up before an officer the man had the villainy to say, "Why, it's the corporal's fault if I slept; he caught me at it once before, and told me he didn't mind."

One such experience as this is enough to harden any tender spot a man may have in his nature; and indeed, after a while, non-commissioned officers learn such severe lessons from the heartless tricks played upon them, that they stick to absolute enforcement of orders as their golden rule. Before a non-commissioned officer can afford to be indulgent he must be a judge of character. Sergeant-Major Harden was one of the best instances I have known of a "non-com" who knew by intuition what men he could trust, but he had a twenty years' experience of soldiering to guide him.

A day on guard is spent in a listless fashion. Some of the men read novels or newspapers; some stand at the railings near the gate, and wink at damsels passing by; nearly all smoke. At half-past twelve dinners are brought in the mess-tins from the barrack-rooms, and a gallon of beer makes its appearance, yielding about a glass per man. The men may take off their headdresses, but not their belts or side-arms, for they must be ready to turn out at any moment when the whole guard may be called. Senior officers, when walking by themselves, often wave their hands to inform the sentry that he need not call out the guard; but if they have ladies with them they never decline the

honours. Towards dusk men stretch themselves on the camp-bed, and try to sleep with their cloaks wrapped round them, and their knapsacks for pillows. Old soldiers sleep as soundly on the planks as elsewhere ; but young soldiers cannot, especially if they have been swallowing much black coffee. Somehow, though, the contradictions of human nature appear in this, that the man whom black coffee will keep tossing on the camp-bed as if he had needles and pins in his legs, will doze off the instant he gets into the sentry-box.

The busiest time in the guard-room is from tattoo to midnight, when the men who have been spending their evenings in the town return to barracks. Gunners must come in at tattoo ; corporals and bombardiers may remain out till ten, sergeants till eleven ; but gunners may get leave till eleven, and " non-coms " till midnight. Every man returning after hours hands in his pass to the sergeant of the guard ; and if he returns late without leave, it rests with that official either to send him to his barrack-room, or to pack him off to the prison guard-room. At half-past ten the military police call for a list of the men missing, and roam the town in search of them. Then men are brought in drunk, often senseless, bloody, and bemuddled after a fight, and have to be escorted to the main-guard room or to hospital, according to their state. Now and then a soldier is brought in without his jacket, and wearing a woman's bonnet ; sometimes a civilian will appear to make a complaint against a soldier (name unknown) who has given him a bloody nose ; or an anxious publican will arrive, saying he has a party of drunken soldiers on his premises, and can't get rid of them. All these things try the tact and good temper of a good sergeant, and keep a bad one growling and storming till he exhausts himself, and towards midnight lies down to sleep, leaving all the relief business till daybreak to be managed by his corporal.

On my last night of guard an event occurred—small in itself, but serious to soldiers—which threw us all for a while into commotion. I was seated at the sergeant's desk at eight o'clock, reading, when my glance happened to fall on the parcel of ball cartridges, and I saw one missing. There ought to have been twelve out among the four sentries; but there were thirteen gone, and it was easy to count from their being arranged in four layers of twenty-five each. I counted again and re-counted, opened the desk, looked under it, and at last woke the sergeant, who was on the camp-bed, and who showed sweet temper at being disturbed. The affair had to be investigated at once, however, for the cartridge could only have been abstracted for a foolish or criminal purpose, and the possession of it might be very dangerous to any man with a carbine. So all the other sleepers were roused. Every man's knapsack was overhauled, every pocket was turned out, and there was a chorus of curses, the soldiers declaring to a man that they had given up their cartridges on coming off sentry. But in the midst of the search a loud explosion took place in the grate, which detached a loose brick, brought down a shower of soot, and nearly upset the kettle on the hob. It was evident that the purloiner of the cartridge had flung it into the fire while my back and the sergeant's were turned; but which man was it? He had done the thing so quickly that nobody had seen him. I suspected a fellow, who began loudly to accuse the "fiddler"—one of the best behaved among the boys—and I was rather disquieted by the occurrence, as he did not look like a man who could have taken the cartridge for fun. He was a false-looking churl, with shifty eyes, and I formed the suspicion (which no after circumstance ever confirmed, however) that some dark piece of work had been premeditated.

This affair somewhat marred harmony for an hour, as the

sergeant swore to report every man on the guard ; but he knew better than to do this, as he would have incurred a reprimand for leaving the cartridges within everybody's reach. As he locked them up in the desk he swore, with many an oath, that it was hard you could not trust a parcel of grown men any more than if they were boys ; and, barring the oaths, I agreed with him.

The hours on guard seem very long after midnight to the corporal, who is afraid to lie down lest he should sleep too long and miss a relief. The men for the reliefs have to be shaken yawning out of slumber ; the others, who come off sentry, just warm themselves for a few minutes, turn up the coffee-pot to see if there is a drop left, and then curl themselves up for a last spell of sleep. The corporal has to keep the fire blazing, and he fondles it like a companion. He tries to read ; listens to the distant cock-crowings, to the striking of church clocks ; strains his ear to listen whether the sentries are calling "All's well !" faithfully, and is mighty pleased at last when at six o'clock the *reveille* bugle starts all the barracks into life again. Then there is a gradual rising of the men from their hard couch ; clothes-brushes and blacking-brushes come into play ; the "fiddler" goes out to fetch water for ablutions ; the men who have brought their shaving tackle shave themselves to kill time ; and presently there is a procession of cooks bringing breakfasts—coffee and bread and butter—which are pleasantly lingered over. All the men rejoice that they have a blank forenoon before them, as there are no morning drills or fatigues for men coming off guard.

So far as I was concerned, my whole day was to be a blank one, for when my guard was dismissed I was sent to the office, where my discharge awaited me. I had nothing more to do then but to deliver up my arms, busby, knapsack, tunic, and all such other articles of my kit as, owing to my

short length of service, had not yet become my own property. The things which I was allowed to keep were a whole suit of clothes—cap, jacket, and trousers—my boots, shoes, and all my brushes. These, however, I afterwards made up in a parcel and sent to Sergeant-Major Harden, who had told me he would be glad to have them. The only mementoes which I retained of my military life were the Bible and Prayer-book supplied with my kit, and the large india-rubber bag, which is the soldier's hold-all, and which made an excellent travelling receptacle for soiled linen. It is so solid that it has defied all wear and tear of time, and is as good as new now.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DISCHARGED.

I HAD written to Mr. Truelove overnight, begging him to send my luggage which he had to the Post Captain. There I went to change my clothes; and when I had put off my uniform, I went to call on Colonel Spilman to thank him for his kindness. This I did by his own desire, for I had continued to work at his cricketing statistics up to the last day but one of my sojourn in the army, and he was good enough to say that he owed me acknowledgments for my zeal. As I was no longer separated from him by the awful distance that had divided us heretofore, the colonel shook hands with me, and after a little conversation conducted me into the drawing-room, where I was introduced to his wife and daughters and invited to stay for luncheon.

The two young ladies (the same whom I had seen in the shop with the colonel, on the day when I had just learned who he was, after having neglected to salute him) had evidently heard a good deal about me, and were curious to make my acquaintance. As they were very pretty and pleasing, the satisfaction was reciprocal.

"Well, Mr. —, you seem to have had a decided taste for military life," remarked Mrs. Spilman when we were at table. "It is a pity you did not get a commission when you were younger."

"I wish very much that I had," I answered.

"I should have advised your staying if you had been a year longer in the service, or if you had had no money left you," said the colonel, "but under your circumstances you would have found the next year or two a very trying time. You must have already noticed that a corporal enjoys no sinecure. Hadn't you some adventure in London the other day with a prisoner?"

"Yes, sir, one I am not likely to forget;" and I gave an account of O'Rourke's escape and capture which greatly entertained the ladies, and made the colonel smile.

"What happened to you might have befallen anybody else," he said. "You appear to me to have taken every reasonable precaution, and yet, if your prisoner had not been recaptured, it would have been difficult to let you go unpunished. Bad luck may often stop a man's promotion, though his conduct is unexceptional. Perhaps, however, we might have let you off in favour of your gallantry on the night before the Indian draft went, when those men so maltreated you. You behaved very well then."

"You were cruelly hurt, I hear?" said Mrs. Spilman with sympathy.

"I was glad all the same that you did not complain of the men who had struck you," remarked the colonel, "though perhaps I ought not to say that. But really I look with consternation on the numbers of men undergoing punishment in our army. When we compare the total of deserters, defaulters, and men in hospital with the effective strength of our forces on paper, the result is appalling."

I asked the colonel whether he did not think that six months' imprisonment for deserting and making away with one's kit was too small a punishment. "Certainly," he answered, "and when a man steals as well as deserts, we sentence him to be dismissed from the army with disgrace,

which is absurd. We want *compagnies disciplinaires* for our bad characters, such as the French have; and they should be stationed in India, Jamaica, and other places far off. If we sent a deserter thousands of miles away from England and compelled him to complete his term of service in a disciplinary company employed on public works, deserters would soon receive a check. Men should be made to feel that when they have enlisted, bad conduct will not shorten their term of service; in fact, the time they spend in prison should not be allowed to count in the service term at all. That is how the French manage: they keep their *compagnies disciplinaires* in Algeria, and incorporate bad characters into them. If a man mends his ways, he is allowed, after a time, to return to regular regimental life, and is taught to regard this privilege as a signal honour and rehabilitation. The *camisards*, as they are called from the blouse they wear, carry no arms and are kept in very strict discipline. I have seen them at work in Algeria, and French officers assured me that the system answered very well."

Colonel Spilman went on to say that our present rules for the punishment of military offenders pressed often too hardly on the men themselves, as for instance when a soldier got sentenced to five years' penal servitude for striking an officer or sergeant, and was sent to undergo his term at Dartmoor or Portland amid the vilest criminals. To strike a superior was of course a serious offence, which must be punished severely, but the offender was not necessarily a scoundrel in the same degree as the barrack-room thief or the systematic deserter, who found in habitual criminals congenial associates. If there were disciplinary companies, the classification of offenders might be made more rationally and their punishments would be more just.

Soon after we had risen from table, Mr. Truelove came

in. I had intended making a farewell call on this gentleman, though not with any purpose of accepting hospitality from him, should he again press it. From a few words which Mrs. Spilman had let fall at table, I gathered one of the motives which had made Mr. Truelove so loth to prosecute George Tudor, and this was that Major Dandimont was paying his addresses to Constance Truelove's younger sister. Mrs. Spilman did not even hint that she knew of George Tudor's doings, but she alluded to Mr. Truelove's "pretty daughter," and to the possibility of a marriage taking place soon. Mr. Truelove now walked in with an air of elation, and whispered a few words to the colonel and his wife, who both began to congratulate him, so that I concluded the major had at last made his proposal. But nothing was said touching this business before me. Mr. Truelove was pleased to express his satisfaction at my change of condition.

"Well, young sir, so you are clothed and in your right mind at last. The shortest follies are the best, so you may consider yourself well quit of a bad bargain."

I bowed with a smile, but made no parry. It was Mrs. Spilman who answered for me, saying that I had no reason to be ashamed of my short stay in the army, for that I had got on very well there.

"Pooh, pooh!" replied Mr. Truelove, clutching the seat of his pantaloons with one hand and waving the other. "He didn't think much of military glory once he had got his legacy, and small blame to him. As to being proud of his uniform, as he once told me he was, I'll be bound he will be in no hurry to speak of it three months after he gets home."

"Pray why not, Mr. Truelove?" I asked.

"Why, because—— But you will find out the reason fast enough. Get among your proper friends again, and you will

soon think like them ; you will find few disposed to speak of your military life as a glorious incident in your annals, or to mention it at all, unless you yourself start the subject."

Truth compels me to confess that these words, which I inwardly resented at the time, were but too prophetic. On going home I was kindly received, like one who, it is to be hoped, has seen the error of his ways ; but there was an affectionate conspiracy among my family to make no allusion whatever to my having been a soldier, lest this reference to by-gones should bring a blush to my brow. I had certainly every reason to feel repentant for the affliction which I had at different times brought upon my parents, but it annoyed me to see everybody so bent upon converting into a dread secret that which seemed to me to require no mystery ; so one morning at breakfast I ventured upon a playful remark about the difference between the fare before me and that I had had in barracks. There was instantly constrained silence at the board. My dear mother poured out the tea rather nervously, and my sisters coloured up to their eyes. Nay, after breakfast one of them sought me out, and in the gentlest way, with a voice full of pity, assured me that everybody in the family felt for me, and they knew how painful it must be to me to think of the past ; but I might take comfort from knowing that on no account would any one ever speak about it, or allude to it before me. When, however, I giddily answered that I saw nothing in my recent career to be ashamed of, the pity of my sister turned to astonishment, and then to anger. If the prodigal son, skipping about the paternal mansion, had made jocular reference to the swine who had shared their acorns with him, his sister must have stared at him as mine did at me. She then told me very explicitly that if I had no consideration for myself she hoped I would have some for others ; that an avowal of my late adventures could only bring me into shocking dis-

repute ; that it would make her and my other sisters hang their heads among their friends, and—and make them afraid to go out to any parties or balls in the county. “Why, what will you think when I tell you that the brother of our footman Thomas is a corporal in the army?” said she, with most doleful emphasis. “Just fancy how you would feel if this man were to come up to you, and want to shake hands *before everybody!*” This picture, conjured up by her imagination, affected my poor sister so powerfully that she began to cry, and I had to comfort her.

When a man cannot prevail on the world to think as he does, he generally has to end by thinking like the world, or rue it ; so less than a year after leaving the service, I found myself listening one day, with an air of perfect commiseration, to a story told me by a clergyman about a young man who had misbehaved himself exactly as I had. He was the son of a county neighbour of ours, a man of wealth ; and having quarrelled with his father, ran off in an angry fit to enlist, was sent out to Africa, and died in battle there. My reverend informant (not aware that there was a pipe-clayed skeleton in my own cupboard) talked of this young man as having gone utterly to the bad, and of his fate as a merited visitation. He was his father’s heir, this boy, and if he had died as an officer a tablet would have been proudly erected to him in the parish church where his family had their pew ; but seemingly the blood which he shed for his country was not accounted glorious coming from a private soldier, and so he had no tablet. His name was clean blotted out. “We never breathe a word about him to his family,” said the clergyman, piously.

Well, I have thought upon all these things, and I have written this book to speak of the army as I knew it. I was not a soldier long enough to acquire an exhaustive knowledge of the service, but I have set down all my recollections

of six months in a depôt, feeling in the uniform now, as when I wore it, an undiminished pride.

It only remains for me to say what became of Mrs. Laura Winkley, who was the first to try and put me out of conceit with soldiering. She rather suddenly married the Mr. Stevens, "commercial traveller in the cigar line," who had a thousand pounds of his own, and was a respectable young man; but I think Mr. Stevens was lucky in knowing nothing about George Tudor, else he might have been plunged into dismal thinking by the nervousness—a cruel nervousness—which for several years used to seize upon his wife whenever a soldier in uniform entered her shop. Laura's eldest boy is christened George.

THE END.



